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BY THE AUTHOR OF

"LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET."

ETC. ETC. ETC.

M E Braddon

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

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CHAPTER I.

ENTANGLEMENTS IN THE WEB.

HARCOURT LOWTHER, calling at the stuccoed mansion in time for Mrs. Tredethlyn's afternoon tea, found a dark and dashing young lady comfortably established in a luxurious amber damask nest against a background of amber curtain, whose glowing tints were extremely becoming to the young lady's clear complexion. The two ladies were quite alone, though Maude declared gaily that she had had crowds of people that afternoon.

"You generally come so late, Mr. Lowther," she said. "Those were the Dudley Boltons whom

you met going out—nice people, fresh from the wolds of Yorkshire, quite new to town, people who come once in ten years or so, when there's an International Exhibition, or something of that kind. Isn't it strange that people *can* be so civilised living in the depths of the country—read the last novel—see the last great picture—because you see, nowadays, great pictures jog about the country like popular prime ministers, and if Mahomet can't go to the mountain in Trafalgar Square, the mountain goes to meet Mahomet in his provincial town. But I want to introduce you to Miss Desmond, the daughter of the late Colonel Desmond, papa's oldest friend. Julia dear, Mr. Lowther has heard me talk of you perpetually, and you have heard a good deal of him,"—Mrs. Tredethlyn blushed a little as she said this,—"so I expect you to be intensely intimate immediately."

This introduction took place towards the close of June, nearly a month after the Oaks day; and during the time that had elapsed since that event, Harcourt Lowther, in his character of Mephistopheles, had found Faust what is popularly called a very troublesome customer. Francis Tredeth-

lyn had a secret, and so far it had been a secret which Mr. Lowther could neither penetrate nor turn to his own use.

Yes, this simple-minded Cornishman, whose confiding candour had revealed every feeling, and every shade of feeling, to his baneful companion, had his secret now, and seemed to know very well how to keep it.

There were days on which he had business which took him a little way out of town; and Harcourt Lowther, pumping never so wisely, could pump no further information out of the secret depths of his friend's mind. He had even proposed to accompany Francis on these mysterious excursions, but his friendly offers had been met by a point-blank refusal. He had ventured a little playful *badinage;* he had gone so far as to make an occasional insinuation; but Francis Tredethlyn had repelled his hints with the fiery indignation of a man whose tenderest and noblest feelings are involved in the subject of his friend's *persiflage.*

"I know you get plenty of pleasant little witticisms of that kind out of those flimsy-covered

books. Mr. Jeffs supplies you with; but hadn't you better keep them for Mrs. de Rothsay's next evening party? They tell so much better amongst people who understand the French phrases you're so fond of using. Some of your best things might as well be Greek, so far as I am concerned," Mr. Tredethlyn said, coolly.

Mephistopheles shrugged his shoulders in mild deprecation of his pupil's impertinence. Faust was positively beginning to acquire the tone of good society. He was learning to be insolent.

Harcourt Lowther left no stone unturned in his endeavours to discover the Cornishman's secret, but unluckily there were not many stones to turn: and when Mr. Lowther had pumped Francis, and pumped Francis's valet, who could give no clue whatever to his master's conduct, there remained nothing more to be done; unless, indeed, Mr. Lowther had cared to resort to the private-inquiry system, and employ a shabby-genteel person at three or four guineas a week to track the footsteps of Mr. Tredethlyn. But this was a plan to which Harcourt Lowther could only have resorted in the most desperate

extremity. If possible, he wanted to do dirty work *without* soiling his fingers. The private-inquiry system would have been a dangerous kind of machinery to put into motion — dangerous even if successful — utterly fatal in the case of failure; and it was just possible that the shabby-genteel person might do his spiriting awkwardly, and make his watchfulness sufficiently intrusive to arouse suspicion, and bring impetuous Francis Tredethlyn down upon him in an avalanche of manly rage.

"Pshaw!" thought Mr. Lowther, after a meditative and leisurely review of his position. "It is only a matter of so much time. '*Point de zèle*,' said Talleyrand; but he only meant, don't be in a hurry. Your zealous diplomatist may be a very valuable person, provided he knows how to keep the secret of his earnestness; but your impatient diplomatist is a certain failure. Yet there are people who *will* gather their fruit before it is ripe. When your true diplomatist comes to an awkward knot in the airy network of his scheme, the best thing he can do is to sit down quietly before the web until some accidental hand unravels

the entanglement. Chance is the unfailing friend of the schemer; but the goddess is very capricious in her visiting routine, and there are stupid creatures who won't wait for a morning call. Luckily, I am not one of them. I can afford to be patient. Maude is an angel; the Stuccoville dinners are excellent, and the Stuccoville wines are my own selection; and for the rest I do pretty well. Ecarté is a most agreeable game; especially when one plays with a man who is half his time so absent-minded as to forget to mark the king. Yes, dear Francis, I can afford to wait for the lucky accident which is to put me in possession of the clue to those little trips of yours, in hansom cabs which you prefer to pick up for yourself; thereby depriving your valet of any help to be derived by an examination of the number of the vehicle, and a subsequent chat with the driver."

Harcourt Lowther came very frequently to Mrs. Tredethlyn's drawing-rooms, now that she was to be found always accompanied by her darling Julia, and entirely unembarrassed by his visits. He did not always come at the orthodox

hour, but would make his appearance between eleven and twelve o'clock on a hopelessly rainy morning, with a new book, or a roll of music, or something delightfully hideous in the way of jelly-fish for Maude's aquarium, or the last fashion in ferns or orchids for Maude's conservatories; and the back of Mrs. Tredethlyn's house broke out into ferneries and conservatories wherever the ingenuity of a fashionable builder could find an excuse for carrying out Mrs. Tredethlyn's graceful ideas, and swelling Mr. Tredethlyn's little account.

Mr. Lowther had contrived to make himself the friend of the house, so there was always some very plausible excuse for visits at unorthodox hours, and pleasant dawdling in Maude's pretty morning-room; and Stuccoville, furtively observant behind rose-coloured curtains in opposite houses, took note of Mr. Lowther's morning calls, and kept a sharp account of the period that elapsed between his entrances and exits; and all this time nothing could be more delicately deferential, more tenderly respectful, than Harcourt Lowther's manner to his friend's wife. By not one hazardous phrase, by not so much as a furtive glance, a half-

suppressed sigh, had he awakened Maude to a perception of possible danger in this pleasant intimacy with the man who had once been her affianced husband. No poisonous breath from the schemer's false lips had tarnished the purity of this bright young soul; but Stuccoville had taken alarm already, and—in confidential converse in cosy corners of ottomans, under the shadow of a tall vase of exotics, or a Parian statuette—declared Mrs. Tredethlyn's conduct to be "Positively appalling, my dear; and that absurd west-country dolt of a husband continues as blind as ever; and now she has taken a companion, my love. You remember the companion in *Vanity Fair;* that delightful Becky calls her a sheep-dog; and you recollect Madame de Marneffe's companion in that horrible novel of Balzac's, which my tiresome Georgiana found the other morning at the bottom of a cupboard, in which her brother Charles keeps his cricketing-shoes and fishing-tackle, and was discovered by the governess sitting on the ground positively devouring the book, and when questioned, said it was *Telémaque;* but as I was about to tell you, my dear, with regard to Mrs. T——

and Mr. H. L——!" and so the little mole-hill gathered size, and gradually grew into a mountain.

Harcourt Lowther and Mrs. Tredethlyn's darling Julia were not slow to arrive at a very friendly understanding. One morning spent in Miss Desmond's society was quite sufficient to show so subtle an observer as Harcourt the real state of that young lady's feelings with regard to her patroness. Indeed, Julia did not take much trouble to conceal her sentiments. Gay and animated one minute, darkly brooding the next, very often captious and contradictory, sharply ironical, or sternly defiant, she was in all things the very reverse of the paid companion who sets her employer's caprices against the amount of her salary, and gratefully accepts any pleasures or advantages that fall in her way. Maude's natural forbearance was exaggerated by a remorseful consciousness that all the luxuries and gaieties of her life were so many blessings which she had in a manner stolen from Julia, and her tenderness towards Miss Desmond was unbounded. But there were times when the Irish girl rebelled even against this tenderness.

"Do you think my poverty is an open wound, that you approach it so shrinkingly?" she exclaimed, impatiently, one day when Maude had broken down in a delicate periphrasis, in which she tried to offer to pay her friend's milliner's bill without wounding her friend's pride. "Why don't you say at once, 'My husband has thirty thousand a year, and a twenty-pound note more or less is ineffably unimportant to me—while *you* must go bareheaded if your pride revolts against dirty tulle and tumbled flowers'? Pay me my salary, Mrs. Tredethlyn, when it becomes due, and do not force your favours upon me! for I come of a proud race, who are slow to perceive the difference between an unwelcome favour and an uncalled-for insult. As for the unmade silk-dresses which you have tried so delicately to force upon me, under the pretence that the colours are unbecoming to your complexion, you can parade your wealth and your generosity by presenting them to your maid. I am *voué au noir* henceforward; and when you are tired of seeing my shabby-genteel black moiré and Limerick lace in some obscure corner of your rooms, you have only

to give me a hint, and I will spend the evening in my own apartment."

It was not often that Miss Desmond indulged in such a speech as this, or perhaps even remorseful Maude could scarcely have endured her companionship. She sometimes made herself very agreeable during those idle rainy mornings in which Maude and Harcourt practised the old concertante duets for flute and piano, or dawdled amongst the delicate ferns with the crackjaw names in the little fernery that opened out of the boudoir; or devised gorgeously incomprehensible illuminations for an obscure verse in Malachi. Miss Desmond could never be charming, for the power to charm is a gift *sui generis*, and does not necessarily go along with versatile accomplishments or intellectual superiority; but she could be an amusing and agreeable companion whenever she pleased to exhibit herself in that character, and she did so please very frequently; for it is so much less trouble to be agreeable than to be disagreeable, that the most persevering sulker is apt to give way under the weary burden of his own bad temper. But let Miss Desmond be ever so

vivacious or ever so delightful, Harcourt Lowther never lost sight of one fact,—and that was the fact of Julia's unappeased and unappeasable hatred of Maude Tredethlyn. Stuccoville, which was omniscient of every thing, knew that Mr. Tredethlyn had been engaged to Julia, and had jilted her in order to marry Maude; and from Stuccoville Mr. Lowther obtained the clue to the Irish girl's feelings.

"A little genuine feminine malice might be rather a useful element, if I can set it working unconsciously for my benefit. Your amateur's assistance is generally a dismal failure; but I really think this Miss Desmond might help me. She is so very clever—and so intensely spiteful."

So one morning when Harcourt Lowther happened to find Julia alone in the morning-room, he took the opportunity of being quite confidential upon the subject of Mr. Tredethlyn's dissipation.

"He dined from home yesterday? and the day before? Ah, to be sure, I dined with him the day before," said Mr. Lowther, with a deprecating sigh. He did not attempt to conceal the fact of his own participation in Francis Tredeth-

lyn's pleasures; but he contrived in the most subtle manner to make it understood that he accompanied Francis in the character of a guardian angel, a protecting spirit in modern costume, with an arresting hand for ever extended to snatch the sinner from the verge of the precipice. Miss Desmond shrugged her shoulders disdainfully.

"I don't think Mrs. Tredethlyn values her husband's society sufficiently to feel his neglect very keenly," she said; "she seems perfectly happy."

Yes, it was quite true; Maude seemed very happy, though her husband spent the best part of his time away from home, and was gloomy and ill at ease in her society. Harcourt Lowther's hints had done their work, and the breach was very wide between husband and wife. Francis believed that his presence was odious to Maude. Maude imagined that home pleasures and simple domestic enjoyments were tame and insipid for Francis. And it had all been so easily done! Harcourt had only to make a few careless speeches about his friend.

"You see, my dear Mrs. Tredethlyn, a man of our dear Frank's temperament requires outdoor amusements—hunting, and shooting, and racing, and all their agreeable concomitants in the way of meet breakfasts and uproarious dinners. A man with Frank's animal spirits must have more boisterous pleasures than can be procured in a drawing-room, however charming—or amongst women, however delightful. There are some men who do *not* care for the society of ladies; very excellent fellows in their way, but men in whose minds poetry and music, beautiful scenery, exquisite sentiments, grand ideas, are all classed under one head as 'doosid bores.' You know the style of man who calls every thing except his horse and his dog a 'doosid bore.' I don't say Tredethlyn is *quite* that sort of man, but he is not a domestic animal."

Mr. Lowther—sitting amongst a chaos of feminine litter, snipping out painted birds and flowers with a pair of fairy-like scissors for Maude's *potichomanie*, looked the very incarnation of all that is domestic and devoted to the fair sex. Perhaps he fully estimated the advantage of the

contrast between his own character and that of the men he had been describing.

Mrs. Tredethlyn gave a little sigh.

"And Frank *used* to be so very domestic; and so dotingly fond of Floss," she said, looking pensively at a mouse-coloured Skye terrier, whose cold nose reposed in the pink palm of her pretty hand. "However, we contrive to do very well without him, don't we, Flossy Possy? and we shouldn't care if he went to all the races in that dreadful calendar, and never, never came near his own house at all, should we, Flossy Possy?"

Harcourt Lowther, looking up furtively from the covert of his auburn eyelashes, snipped a bird into mincemeat, and tightened his mouth until the thin lips were scarcely visible.

"That nonsense sounds rather like pique," he thought. "Can she care for the fellow? A handsome boor, who would scarcely know the difference between Beethoven's 'Moonlight' and 'Rule, Britannia'!—can she have the faintest sentiment of affection for such a man as that, when——"

Mr. Lowther's self-esteem finished the sentence,—

"When she knows me, and can contrast my infinite graces and accomplishments with the boor's defects?"

But Mr. Lowther, looking at his position in all its aspects, could not do otherwise than perceive that the provincial rust was gradually wearing off the farmer's son, and that Francis Tredethlyn was learning to hold his own amongst men who had played cricket in the Eton meads, and paced the grand old cloisters and quadrangles of Oxford and Cambridge. Association is the best schoolmaster; and even in Bohemia, a man who is blessed with a fair amount of intelligence must learn something.

There were times when Harcourt Lowther frowned darkly as he brooded over his cards, and began to think that the game was not such an easy one to win, after all. But he played patiently, notwithstanding; and, true to his faith in the saving help of Chance, he waited for the goddess to look over his shoulder, and point with her inspired finger to the trump which should win him the final trick.

CHAPTER II.

THE TWO ANTIPHOLI.

It was while the schemer was waiting that an event occurred which had some influence upon the current of his life.

His elder brother, heir to all that Robert Lowther, of Lowther Hall, Hampshire, had to leave, and expectant heir to the more important possessions of a very wealthy maiden aunt, returned unexpectedly from Belgium, where he had been established for some time as a member of the *Corps Diplomatique*, and dropped unannounced into Mr. Lowther's lodging while that gentleman was lounging over his breakfast.

The meeting between the two brothers was not remarkable for its enthusiasm. Roderick Lowther strolled lazily into the room, dropped into an easy-chair, and indulged in a long lei-

surely stretch and a loud yawn before he addressed his astonished relative.

"Didn't expect to see me yet awhile, did you, old boy? Been travelling all night, and feel as if my bones were not so much bones as rheumatism,—some fellow says something like that in a book, doesn't he? Came over in the *Baron Osy;* very bad passage, jolting and tumbling about all night, waves mountains high, as people say in books. So you've cut the line, dear boy, and are living on the proceeds of your commission, I suppose? The warrior blood of the Lowthers who fought at Bosworth and Flodden seems to have lost a little of its fiery quality in filtering through three centuries of country gentlemen. There was a Lowther who distinguished himself at bloody Malplaquet, by the bye, and another who was with young General Wolfe on the heights of Quebec. But we've done with all that nowadays. We are peacefully disposed, and sell out on the earliest opportunity; and we steal a march on our beloved brother, and come home on the quiet to cultivate our maiden aunt."

"That's a lie," replied Harcourt, very coolly. "I haven't been near her since I came home."

"What did you come home for then?" asked the other. "*You came for something.*"

The two men looked at each other. They were very much alike. There was the same steelly light in the blue eyes, the same tight contraction of the thin lips. The elder looked at the younger with a glance of shrewd inquiry; the younger looked back sulky defiance.

"Come," said the traveller, after a second leisurely stretch and a second prolonged yawn, "what is it then, the little game? Say, my friend. You didn't sell out of her Majesty's service without a motive, and you didn't come home without a motive. By Jove! you never did any thing in your life without a motive. You are a schemer, my dear Harcourt. The schemer is born, and not made, and he must obey his instincts. Dear boy, I know your organisation, and in these days of physiological science no man can keep himself quite dark. Iago would have been a failure if Othello had studied his Lavater.

Be candid, Harcourt, and tell me what noble vessel, laden with the spoils of a new Peru, flaunts her white sails upon the wind, and invites the attention of the pirate."

"You are so deuced confiding yourself, that you've a right to demand another fellow's confidence," Harcourt responded, moodily. "When I want your help, I'll tell you my secrets. That has been *your* way of managing matters, I believe."

"My Harcourt bears malice!" exclaimed Roderick. "Antipholus of Ephesus reproaches Antipholus of Syracuse. Dear boy, I suppose it's our misfortune to be too much alike. Perhaps, if you won't give me your confidence, you will at least oblige me with a chop. There was an atmosphere of smoky chimneys and warm train-oil on board the *Baron* which incapacitated me for breakfast."

Mr. Lowther the elder possessed himself of the teapot, and appropriated his brother's breakfast-cup, while Harcourt rang the bell, and gave an order for additional rolls and chops.

"I didn't know you were coming to England,"

Mr. Lowther the younger said, after a pause, in which he had stared moodily at his brother.

"I suppose not," answered the other; "and I can't say that the heartiness of your welcome is very encouraging to the returning prodigal. However, as I have not been in these dominions for the last three years or more, and as my father and I are not the best friends—there's nothing so economical for a parent as a long-standing quarrel with all his children, by the way,—I shall look to you, my dear Harcourt, for any friendly offices I may require. I have three months' leave of absence, and I have not—*le sou.* I come to England to recuperate, as brother Jonathan has it. I want to get on the blind side of my beloved aunt to the tune of a few hundreds; and I want to marry an heiress."

"Oh," said Harcourt, thoughtfully, "you want to marry an heiress?"

"Yes; can you help me to do it?"

"I think not."

"Humph! perhaps if I could make it worth your while to assist me you'd tell another story.

However, you can introduce me to some nice people, I suppose?"

Harcourt nodded moodily.

"And I must look up my own old set. Not that I know many people, for I lived such a hide-and-seek sort of life when I was in England. Can you get me rooms in this house? We can commonise, you know. I left my portmanteaus on board the *Baron*. I suppose there's a boots, or a somebody of the scout species appertaining to this establishment, who can take a cab, and fetch them for me?"

Thus unceremoniously did Antipholus of Syracuse establish himself in the abode of his ungracious brother. Frankenstein, pursued by the monster of his creation, could scarcely have seemed more ill at ease than Harcourt Lowther under the infliction of his brother's society. Was it that these men were too much alike? Did Harcourt think that the keen eyes of his brother would follow every thread in the intricate network of his scheme, and the subtle brain of his brother would apply itself to plotting against him?

But the coolness so apparent in Harcourt's reception of the returning wanderer made no impression whatever on that gentleman. Roderick Lowther stretched his long legs upon his brother's hearth-rug, and smoked his brother's cigars, with a serene indifference as to his brother's feelings.

"If you dine any where to-day you can take me with you;" he said blandly; "and to-morrow I'll introduce you to a splendid set of fellows at the 'Traveller's.' You haven't thought of an heiress yet, I suppose?"

"No."

"Ah, you'll hit upon something in that way presently, I daresay, if you run your mind's eye over your visiting list. I'm in no hurry. Three months is a small eternity in these days of railroads and photography."

"And you really would marry?" said Harcourt again, very thoughtfully.

"Really would? Of course I would, if I could get the chance of making an advantageous match, and propitiate my aunt Dorothea by the sacrifice.

You know how bent the prudent old lady has always been on my making a great marriage, and restoring the forgotten glories of the Lowthers. Yes, Harcourt, I come prepared for victory, and I trust to your brotherly friendship to help me to see and conquer."

"Humph! By the bye, I suppose you have heard nothing of—"

"Not a word," answered Roderick, rather hastily; "I know what you're going to talk about, and as that's rather an unpleasant subject to me, we may as well agree to avoid it. I wrote a letter, candid, explanatory, and so forth; promising to do what I considered my duty. I don't profess to be a generous man, and I freely acknowledge that I'm a very poor one; so the modest annual sum, which I considered my duty, was ——well, *very modest!* However, the letter was unanswered. People drop through, you see," concluded Mr. Lowther the elder, blowing away a slender puff of blue vapour, as if he had been blowing away a troublesome subject; "and when people do, of their own election, drop through, I

can't see that it's any fellow's duty to dig them up again. *You* haven't heard any thing, I suppose?"

"Not a word."

"Fortunate for you! Sometimes that sort of person fastens on to one's relations. However, as I observed before, we'll agree to avoid the subject. Suppose we discuss your affairs?"

"I had much rather we did not."

"Of course, dear boy; but as I am candidly disposed myself, I don't mean to be kept in the dark by the most saturnine of brothers who ever sulked in the face of an amiable relative. *You* used to be engaged to an heiress—something in the Moorgate-Street line—Australian merchandise, wasn't it? a Miss Hillersdon, or Hillary, eh, dear boy? There used to be something of that sort on the cards, I believe?"

"There used to be, but there has ceased to be for the last twelve months. Will that do for you?"

"Ah, Miss Hillersdon—or Hillary—has jilted you, I suppose?"

"She has."

"And the man she has married—"

"Is my very good friend, the happy possessor of a charming wife and a large fortune, and the man at whose house I dine to-day."

"Oh!" exclaimed Roderick Lowther, lengthening the ejaculation to its extremest capacity of extension—"oh, I think I begin to understand your policy. Miss Hillary has married a rich man, and you are intimate with the husband and *au mieux* with the wife. The husband is a sickly fellow—consumptive—apoplectic, eh, dear boy?"

"The husband is something over six feet high, and has the shoulders of a lifeguardsman; and, if it were not for his dissipated habits, might live to be ninety."

"Ah, if it were not for his dissipated habits. And you are his intimate friend? My dear Harcourt, what a very transparent game you are playing! and what a consummate fool you must be if you supposed that I shouldn't see through it! Why not a bond of union between us—all for one and one for all, like Dumas's musketeers? Help

me to find an heiress, and I'll help you *auprès de* Mrs.—, what's the lady's name, by the bye?"

Harcourt Lowther allowed this last piece of information to be screwed out of him, and parted with it as grudgingly as he had parted with the rest. It is not a pleasant thing, when you are playing a very difficult game with the odds against you, to have an inconvenient brother swooping down upon you and insisting on looking over your hand.

There was no affection between these two brothers; the likeness which they bore to each other, morally as well as physically, seemed to have a blighting influence upon their relations. They knew each other, and they distrusted each other. Perhaps it would have been scarcely too much to say they hated each other.

But they went out to dinner together nevertheless, and Harcourt smilingly introduced his brother to Mrs. Tredethlyn and Miss Desmond. They had plenty of time to grow quite intimate in the drawing-room while they were waiting for Francis, who came in, flushed with a hurried toi-

let, at ten minutes to eight. He had been absent upon one of his mysterious excursions a little way out of town.

Roderick Lowther was received very graciously by the two ladies, and cordially welcomed by Mr. Tredethlyn. Harcourt, watching his brother ensconced in a nook of Maude's favourite ottoman, and discoursing at his ease upon Belgian notabilities, was troubled by dark misgivings of danger.

"I must find the fellow a quarry for himself," he thought, "or he'll be trying to stalk my game. He asks me to introduce him to an eligible *parti* as coolly as if life were a five-act comedy, with the traditional heiress always waiting to fall a prey to the traditional adventurer. An heiress! in these days of marvellous commercial successes there must be such things as heiresses. But the question is where to look for them."

One of Mr. Tredethlyn's pompous retainers opened the drawing-room door at this moment, and announced,—

"Mr. and Miss Grunderson."

"Egad!" thought Harcourt Lowther, "there's the solution of my difficulty. Why not Miss Grunderson? Miss Grunderson is an heiress, or ought to be, if there is stability in any part of the commercial universe."

A young lady with a very rosy face, a young lady decidedly inclined to that quality which in the fair sex is elegantly entitled *embonpoint*, a young lady who was surrounded by surging flounces of pink areophane, dotted about with more pink rose-buds and larger full-blown roses than were ever worn by any young lady with a judicious recollection of the sweeps on May-day, bounced into the room, and bounced up to Mrs. Tredethlyn; while an elderly gentleman, who was evidently the young lady's papa, beamed mildly at the company across an enormous expanse of embroidered shirt-front and black waistcoat.

But in the network that Harcourt Lowther has woven Miss Grunderson is destined to be considerably entangled, and deserves to be introduced more ceremoniously in a fresh chapter.

CHAPTER III.

THE DIPLOMATIST'S POLICY.

THAT ponderous Mr. Grunderson, who plunged heavily down upon Maude's central ottoman, a miraculous combination of upholstery and floriculture—that shining bald-headed Mr. Grunderson, who sat placidly grinning at the company, and addressed his hostess as "Mum"—had begun life as a market-gardener; and, had Mrs. Tredethlyn been born some twenty years earlier, would have been proud to supply her with azaleas and camellias for the decoration of the ottoman upon which he was now sitting. The march of progress, and the accompanying march of bricks and mortar, had driven before them the cabbages and strawberry-beds, the cucumber-frames and young plantations of evergreens, by the cultivation of which Mr. Grunderson and his forefathers

had lived comfortably upon one-o'clock dinners of fat bacon and indigestible dumplings, with occasional varieties of butcher's meat, thinking themselves passing rich when their ledgers showed a profit of two or three hundred pounds at the end of the year.

The march of civilisation, or rather the march of the myrmidons of that unreasoning despot, that implacable ruler, whom women call Fashion, always pushing westward, had contrived to push Mr. Grunderson's gardens off the face of the earth, and in so doing had set a Pactolus flowing steadily into Mr. Grunderson's pocket. The wealth poured in upon him with a rapidity which was like nothing but a fairy tale. That heroic Jack of the nursery story—who, by the bye, seems to have had no surname—never looked in more amazement on the bean-stalk that shot into the very skies in a single night, than did the honest market-gardener at the stuccoed district which had arisen, seven or eight stories and a campanello tower high, on the fields where he remembered execrating the slugs on dewy mornings a few years

before. Where a prairie of bright-red stocks had perfumed all the summer air with spicy odours, a square of stately mansions stared grimly at each other, and prime-ministers' carriages rolled with meteor lamps through the midnight darkness. Where ragged children, and gaunt sunburnt women, in blucher-boots and with indescribable bonnets balanced on their freckled noses, had weeded strawberry-beds for a pitiful sixpence a day, duchesses trailed their silken trains and wearied of the rolling hours after the approved manner of their kind in the pages of the poets and romancers. The transformation was as perfect as it had been rapid; and instead of the cabbages and cabbage roses, the cucumber-frames and hothouse flowers of his youth and early manhood, Mr. Grunderson found himself, at fifty years of age, proprietor of ground-rents that made him a millionaire. He had only one child, a daughter, who had been educated for some fifty pounds a year at a seminary for young ladies, in which she had been cruelly snubbed on account of her father's cabbages, and who was now determined

to revenge herself on the companions of her blighted youth by the splendour of her womanhood. Led by this young lady, who was blessed with an energetic temperament and imperturbable good humour, Mr. Grunderson found himself, always more or less independently of his own agency, going through the complete formula of fashionable life according to his daughter Rosa's notion of that formula; which notion was extremely variable, and took its colour from the last acquaintance to whom the lively heiress was pleased to attach herself.

The very last just now happened to be Maude Tredethlyn, about whom Rosa was ready to go off into raptures at any moment, and whom she always spoke of as "a dear," "a love," or "a darling." But there was a warm womanly heart beating under Rosa's fine dresses, and her raptures had more meaning in them than the raptures of enthusiastic young ladies are apt to have. She attached herself so effectually to Maude that Mrs. Tredethlyn was fain to forget, or at any rate to forgive, the occasional lapses in her grammar, the

unpleasant warmth of her fat little hands, which always came flopping down on the hands of her companion when she was enthusiastic, and the shadow of vulgarity which is so apt to accompany the sunshine of low-born liveliness.

Harcourt Lowther took an early opportunity to inform his elder brother that the young lady in pink areophane was an heiress, and an heiress well worthy the cultivation of any enterprising young diplomatist. Roderick was not slow to take the hint, but he was a great deal too much of a diplomatist to attempt any obvious angling for this rich prize. He exerted all his powers of fascination in order to make himself agreeable to Mrs. Tredethlyn, and he did not address so much as one syllable of the most commonplace civility to the market-gardener's daughter; the consequence of which little manœuvre was, that, as Rosa was sitting next to Maude all the evening, she listened open-mouthed to every word he uttered, and when she departed in her papa's three-hundred-guinea chariot—the market-gardener had insisted on possessing the traditional lemon-coloured chariot with hammer-

cloth, and powdered retainers, which he had beheld and admired in his boyhood—she carried Roderick Lowther's image away with her.

It must be acknowledged, however, that it was no uncommon occurrence for Miss Grunderson to carry the image of some tolerably good-looking and passably well-mannered young man away from any festal gathering at which she happened to find herself. The good-humoured Rosa had a habit of falling desperately in love with any eligible person whom she encountered either in public or private life, who did any thing to make himself notorious, or wore his hair long enough to be entitled a Being. A long list of Beings had occupied that sentimental caravansary which Miss Grunderson called her heart. She had been in love with all the poets, from the Laureate to Mr. Tupper; with all the novelists, from the great Sir Edward to the newest fledged of Mr. Mudie's popularities; and I fear she often fell in love with angels unawares in the shape of feminine romancers who were pleased to hide their gentle sex under masculine nomenclature. She had been in love—fathoms deep—with Lord

Palmerston, Signor Mario, Sir Edwin Landseer, and Mr. Charles Mathews. She was wont to keep the three-hundred-guinea chariot waiting in Pall Mall for an hour at a stretch while she hunted Mr. Graves and his assistants for the last new portrait of her last new idol; and her room was like a good Catholic's chapel,—hung with the engraved effigies of an army of saints.

It was a very pure flame which burnt before so many shrines, and a very harmless one; and perhaps if Mr. Lowther the elder had known Rosa Grunderson's little idiosyncrasies, he would not have felt quite so complacently triumphant in the consciousness that her round gray eyes had been fixed upon him all the evening with the fond gaze of hero-worship. Harcourt contrived to swell this triumph by artful little brotherly compliments, as the two young men walked London-wards under the starlit summer sky, smoking their regalias, and talking as men about town do talk under those sublime stars. Sentimental Rosa was gazing at those luminous unknown worlds from the covert of the pinkest curtains in Stuccoville, and thinking about

Him! Rosa's last adoration was always mysteriously alluded to under cover of a personal pronoun. Her admiration for Roderick Lowther was multiplied a hundredfold by the young diplomatist's disregard of her. Poor Rosa had been accustomed to be made the object of what, in the argotic parlance of her age, she called "a dead set," on account of her papa's ground-rents; and she was inclined to imagine Mr. Lowther the noblest and most disinterested of mankind because he did not commence this "dead set" immediately after being introduced to her.

"I wonder whether he knows that I'm *the* Miss Grunderson?" she thought, as she looked up at those romantic stars so familiar to her in her Byron. "Of course he does, though. 'Pa is *so* different from the rest of society, that people always know there's some reason for his being where he is, and they're not very long guessing that the reason is money. Will any body ever want to marry me for my own sake, I wonder? Ah, how I wish the Marquis of Westminster would fall in love with me! *He* couldn't want 'pa's ground-rents."

Thus the maiden mused in her bower, while Roderick Lowther, encouraged by his junior, talked complacently of his conquest.

"She's the simplest little thing in Christendom," he said; "simpler than—any body I ever met in my life. The disinterested game is the dodge in that quarter, dear boy. Do you remember how Frederic Soulié's *Lion* treats the little shopkeeper's daughter? First with the elegant devotion of a fashionable Romeo, then with the *brusquerie* of a Benedict or a Petruchio. *Lise Laloine* died under the treatment; but I don't think the plump Rosa is made of quite such ethereal stuff. *La Petite* is sentimental, and wants to be loved for herself alone; 'Oh, wert thou in the cauld blast!' 'And long he mourned, the Lord of Burlegh;' and that sort of thing. She shall have it, the darling innocent! Tennyson and Owen Meredith by the *kilo*, disinterested devotion by the bushel. But oh, my Harcourt, do not lure your loving brother into the quagmire of delusive wealth. Make sure that our simple-looking Grunderson does not hide the cloven hoof of insolvency under the golden fleece

in which he drapes himself: those simple-looking men generally fail for half a million. I like your Mrs. Tredethlyn, by the bye; she is very pretty and very elegant; but, to be candid, my dear Harcourt—a brother ought to be candid, you know, even at the risk of being unpleasant—I fancy there is more in the husband than you imagine. A man with such a chest must have some solidity in his composition. If I am any thing of a physiologist, it is not in that man's organisation to be made a fool of. Ah, I see you don't care to talk about it; you like to keep your own secrets, and play your own game without backers or advisers. So be it. For myself, I am of an open disposition; I like to talk of my own affairs when they go smoothly, and to drop them when they take the crooked course. I don't suppose Napoleon the First was very fond of talking about Waterloo. He forgot *that* little skirmish, you may depend; and talked of Arcola and Lodi, the Pyramids, Austerlitz, Wagram, and Auerstadt. I daresay Mr. Merry holds his tongue about those two-thousand-guinea colts that *didn't* win the Derby. People are *not* eloquent about

their failures. I shall look up my old aunt early to-morrow morning; and after that, if you have any excuse for calling on Mrs. Tredethlyn, I shall be glad to accompany you. Unless I am very much at fault in feminine psychology, Miss Grunderson will drop in upon her friend, to discuss my bearish behaviour, on the earliest opportunity. Nothing impresses a sentimental young person so favourably as downright rudeness. The heroine in a lady's novel always adores the man who snubs her."

Thus argued the diplomatist by profession, strolling Strand-wards in the star-light; while the diplomatist by organisation listened quietly, and thought his own thoughts as regarded this grand conquest, of which his kinsman was so proud. Harcourt Lowther was not apt to resent the insolent *insouciance*, the calm assurance of superiority, with which his senior treated him, and indeed had treated him from that early boyhood in which the lads had played together at Eton. But the wrongs that rankle deeply in a man's breast are sometimes those which he endures silently.

Harcourt believed that his own prospects had been sacrificed to the advancement of Roderick; and he was not sorry when the elder son went wild, and turned his back as coolly upon his father as if he had never been the pampered favourite of weak love, the all-absorbing drain upon a limited income. In every way Roderick had fared better than his brother. Lowther Hall, surrounded by park and farm-lands that constituted an estate of some three hundred acres, might not be worth very much to a man of large ideas and lofty aspirations; but whatever it was worth, it was tightly entailed upon the heir of the Lowthers, and not so much as a game-keeper's cottage or a scrap of meadow-land was reserved for the luckless junior. Mrs. Lowther had been mistress of a small fortune, but that had been spent on the education of the two young men,—Harcourt in this matter, as in all others, going to the wall; for his University career had been cut short in order that his brother's debts might be paid, and that extravagant gentleman be enabled to face the big-wigs of his college without fear of clamorous creditors, and

read at leisure for a degree which he was too lazy to succeed in getting. After this Harcourt's prospects had again been sacrificed, and the young barrister, unable to live at the bar, had been fain to accept an ensign's commission; while Roderick, pushed into the diplomatic world by a desperate effort of family interest, exhibited his handsome face at the Prussian Court, and squandered every farthing that he could screw out of his father's slender purse. When the purse had become as empty as it well could, there had been the usual remonstrances, the usual bad feeling which is likely to arise between an utterly selfish and unprincipled young man and the father who is no longer able to be of any use to him, and who takes the liberty of resenting the extravagance which has involved his later life in difficulties.

Besides the advantages obtained from his father's partiality, Roderick Lowther had been the favourite of a maiden aunt of miserly habits and independent fortune, who had condescended to give him her name at the baptismal font, and who had never bestowed on him any thing else—ex-

cept, indeed, a neat cloth-bound copy of *The Dairyman's Daughter*, presented to the lad one birthday, and promptly disposed of at a rag-and-bone shop in the High Street of Harrow for the small sum of fourpence. But although Miss Dorothea Burnett had not been very liberal in her donations to her favourite nephew during her lifetime, it was supposed that, after her departure from this world, the young man would reap the reward of occasional dutifully-worded letters and affected deference to her wishes, and that the reward would be a very substantial one; for Miss Burnett had contrived to swell her own little fortune by many stray windfalls in the way of legacies from relatives, whose regard her busy married sister Mrs. Lowther had neglected to cultivate. Beyond this the maiden lady had bought small but profitable tenements, and had dabbled a little in shares; and she had watched her small investments with an intelligence, and nursed them with a tenderness, which her stockbroker had admiringly declared to be a credit to the sex she adorned by her commercial acumen.

So Roderick Lowther, finding his younger brother on the field, was alarmed by the idea that he might have been undermined in this direction, and was by no means inclined to lose any time before presenting himself to his spinster aunt. He brushed and curled his amber whiskers with more than usual circumspection, therefore, on the morning after the dinner at Mrs. Tredethlyn's; and walking through Covent Garden, on his way to Miss Burnett's Bloomsbury hermitage, he expended sixpence on a hot-house flower to put in the button-hole of the dark-blue coat which he wore under a flimsy outer garment of pale gray. He had dressed himself very carefully; for he knew that, in spite of the maiden lady's lectures on the subject of prudence, her feminine eye was fascinated by the elegant frivolities which she affected to disapprove.

Miss Burnett occupied a very big house in the dullest street in Bloomsbury—a dismal *cul de sac*, in which there was almost always an elderly organ-grinder playing "Home, sweet home," or the "Old Hundredth," with a little group of squalid

children gathered round him. The big house smelt like a tomb, and was almost as rarely opened as if it had been one; for the butcher-boy who brought Miss Burnett's mutton-chop, or the half-pound of steak or three-quarters of liver, upon which Miss Burnett's servant was wont to make her repast, handed his wares across the area-gate, and exchanged no word of comment with the grim damsel who received them; knowing very well that the lady of the house sat at her favourite window in the front parlour, with her open Bible before her, and a watchful eye upon the outward world, which some sentimental Christians might have thought scarcely consistent with so much piety.

The grim damsel who admitted Roderick Lowther to Miss Burnett's darksome abode relaxed her ordinary sternness of visage into something faintly resembling a smile as she recognised her mistress's nephew.

"Your aunt has been very ill since you were last here, Mr. Lowther," the woman said, in answer to Roderick's inquiry. "She was very bad

with her asthma all the winter; but the warm spring weather brought her round again."

"Yes," thought the young man, "the spring weather always does bring her round,—and always will, I suppose, till I am dead and in my grave."

He was ushered into the dining-room while this irreverent idea was in his mind; and the next minute he was seated opposite to his aunt, inquiring tenderly about her asthma. The dining-room was very dismal. There was more mahogany furniture and brown damask than is compatible with the smallest ray of cheerfulness, and the walls were rendered ghastly by some hideous preparations painted in asphaltum, and exhibiting gigantic cracks that looked like gory, yawning wounds,—preparations which, on account of their smoky nature and revolting choice of subject, were supposed to be the work of the old masters.

"I am very glad to see you, my dear Roderick," said Miss Burnett, gravely; "as glad as I can be about any thing in this carnal life," added the old lady, whose spirits had been revived

that morning by a rise of one and a quarter per cent in the value of her pet investment. "But we are taught not to rejoice, Roderick, except in that which——Is that a hot-house flower, my dear?" inquired Miss Burnett, looking sharply at the myosotis in her nephew's button-hole. "Dear, dear! what an extravagant age it is! You are looking very well, my dear Roderick. I daresay you are what a worldly-minded person would call very handsome; but we must try to remember that we are all worms," murmured the old lady with a doleful sigh; for she took the gloomy view of things which is so common to some people who read that Gospel which is all life and colour and brightness, full of the happy faces of merry-makers at a bridal festival, and little children gathering round a favourite Teacher's knees, radiant with sudden rejoicings in mourning households, the dead restored to smile upon the living. There is something strange in the dull gray tint which some worshippers are able to infuse into a story that a painter can hardly read without feeling the tropical heat of a meridian sun, the perfume of a

thousand lilies, the spicy odours of the feathery palms, and the free dash of Galilee's blue waves about the prow of a fisherman's frail bark sailing gaily under an Eastern sky. Surely the richness of colour with which the Catholic church invests the Christian faith is, after all, only the natural attribute of a religion which arose amid the splendour and beauty of the Holy Land!

"I hope, my dear Roderick," said the maiden lady very solemnly, "that, while absent in those idolatrous foreign lands, you kept the promise which you gave me before leaving England."

"My dear aunt," murmured the young man, who had quite forgotten having made any promise whatever to his pious relative, and was painfully mystified by this address, "I assure you that I—"

He would have broken down here, but the lady came to his rescue.

"Don't prevaricate, Roderick!" she exclaimed, sternly. "Did you, or did you not, enter a Roman Catholic place of worship during your sojourn among the high priests of Baal? Did you, or

did you not, sit under one of those idolatrous worshippers of stocks and stones? And oh, that I should live to see candlesticks on the altar of a church in this very neighbourhood!" cried Miss Burnett, with a sudden burst of indignation; "and to hear snuffling, which I at first attributed to a cold in the head, but afterwards ascertained to be the wicked workings of ROME!"

The stanch Dorothea paused for a few moments to recover her indignation, and then tackled her nephew once more.

"You promised me, before going to Belgium, that you would not, however tempted, enter a Roman Catholic place of worship," she said.

"And I did *not*, my dear aunt," answered Roderick, promptly; "I give you my word of honour as a gentleman." "Nor any other place of worship," thought the heir, as his aunt nodded approvingly.

And then there was a little more talk, chiefly taking the form of a catechism, which Mr. Lowther went through triumphantly, since his answers to the old lady's inquiries were shaped in accord-

ance with his knowledge of what was likely to please his aunt, rather than with any reference to actual fact. But a man must do a good many mean things when he devotes himself to the cultivation of a narrow-minded maiden aunt, for the chance of inheriting small tenements and first-preference bonds in flourishing railway companies. Roderick Lowther breathed a long sigh of relief when he left the house that smelt like a tomb behind him, after drinking a glass of his aunt's dry sherry, which act of devotion was in itself no small penance.

He hailed a hansom as soon as he was safely beyond ken of the observant spinster, and was rattled back to his brother's lodgings, where he found Harcourt pondering moodily over the *Times* newspaper, and whence the same hansom drove the two Antipholi to Stuccoville.

Mr. Tredethlyn was out, but Mrs. Tredethlyn was at home. Harcourt went into his friend's study to write a note; while Roderick followed a servant to the drawing-rooms, in the smallest and cosiest of which three gorgeous apartments the

diplomatist found Maude and Rosa seated side by side on a low sofa, while proud Julia meditated apart at the window.

"You're the lady I should like to marry," thought Roderick, as he looked at Julia's dark face, which lighted up for a moment with her flashing smile as she bowed to him, and then relapsed into gloom; "there'd be some pleasure in taming *you*. Who would care to cage a robin? but there would be some glory in subduing the spirit of an eagle."

Thus mused Mr. Lowther, while he murmured some commonplace remark upon the beauty of the summer day, and dropped himself lazily into a seat near Maude Tredethlyn. He was true to his tactics of the night before, and addressed his remarks almost entirely to Maude and Julia. When he did condescend to address the vivacious Rosa, he did so in a manner that was a delicate admixture of the intellectual bearishness of one of poor Miss Brontë's heroes with the lively banter of a Benedick. The result of this policy was triumphant, and the market-gardener's daughter

plunged deeper and deeper still into her five-and-twentieth hopeless attachment.

While Mr. Lowther the elder was cultivating his own interests in the drawing-room, Mr. Lowther the younger was pacing up and down Francis Tredethlyn's study in no happy frame of mind. Imagine the feelings of a Mephistopheles who begins to suspect that his victim has slipped away from him. Harcourt was beginning to feel very doubtful as to the firmness of his hold on his pupil and companion.

Francis Tredethlyn's conduct for the last few weeks had quite baffled his friend's penetration. The Cornishman had grown suddenly preoccupied and reserved. He might still be seen in the haunts of the Bohemians—for Mr. Lowther took care that he should not easily extricate himself from the bonds that he had allowed to be coiled about him; but Francis, always unwilling to be led into the scenes where he had no pleasure, was now more unwilling than ever, and Harcourt found it very difficult to play the game he wanted to play without showing his cards. If it had been a mere question

of plucking so many feathers from an innocent pigeon, the thing might have been done easily enough, perhaps; but Mr. Lowther evidently wanted something more than his friend's golden plumage. It seemed, indeed, as if he would be satisfied with nothing less than the utter ruin and degradation of Maude Tredethlyn's husband.

To-day, walking up and down the study, whose broad plate-glass window commanded an agreeable view of a stony quadrangle and the roofs and chimneys of a mews, Harcourt thought very despondently of that grand scheme to which he had devoted himself so patiently since his return to England.

"What secret is the fellow hiding from me?" he thought, resentfully; "he refused to dine with me to-day, and he threw over the party I made for Greenwich the day before yesterday. He has made no book for the York summer, and yet he is less at home than ever. What does it all mean? Can he have gone to the bad in real earnest at last, and without any help from me? There must be something in it; but what is the something?"

Tired at last of such meditations as these, Harcourt Lowther flung himself into a chair to compose the letter he had talked about writing when he entered the study.

He wrote his note, which was very brief, and the gist of which was to remind Francis of some engagement that would entail the usual champagne drinking, the usual squandering of money for the gratification of the worthless society in which a few innocent pigeons abandon themselves to be plucked without mercy by every species of predatory fowl. After having written this little note, so carefully worded that no print of the fiend's hoof could have been deciphered therein by uninitiated eyes, Harcourt Lowther sat with his elbow on the table, biting the feather of his pen, and ruminating moodily. There were open letters and tradesmen's bills lying about upon Francis Tredethlyn's disorderly writing-table. Mr. Lowther flung aside his pen presently, and amused himself by a careless examination of these documents. Some of the bills were heavy ones, but not so heavy as to make any very serious inroad upon

the Cornishman's fortune, and Harcourt tossed them away from him one after the other, uninterested in their details, unconcerned by their sum-totals, until he came to a dead stop all at once at the first line of a document which seemed to him to bear an extraordinary significance.

This document was the bill of a fashionable upholsterer, and the line below the tradesman's name and address ran thus:

"For goods supplied to Francis Tredethlyn, Esq., at Brook Cottage, Petersham, June 20th, 185-;" and then followed a list of the furniture for a cottage, the sum-total of which came to little more than three hundred pounds.

"So," muttered Mr. Lowther, "I think I have fallen upon the clue to the mystery. We will go and look at Mr. Tredethlyn's furnished cottage."

He wrote the address on a tablet in his *porte-monnaie*, and went up-stairs to the drawing-room, where he found Roderick intolerably at his ease in the society of the three ladies. There was an arrangement made for a meeting in Maude's roomy

box at Covent Garden, to which Mrs. Tredethlyn was fain to invite the affectionate Rosa, who clung to her with peculiar fondness to-day: and then the two gentlemen took their departure; Roderick to look in at the "Traveller's" and the "St. James's;" Harcourt to hurry post-haste — or rather hansom cab haste—to the Waterloo terminus, whence he took the train for Richmond.

CHAPTER IV.

HARCOURT GATHERS HIS FIRST-FRUITS.

THE party in Mrs. Tredethlyn's opera-box that evening was a very pleasant one. Whatever business had taken Harcourt Lowther to Richmond must have been tolerably satisfactory in its result, for that gentleman's spirits were gayer than usual as he stood behind Maude's chair in the shadow of the crimson curtain, talking to her under cover of all those crashing choruses and grand orchestral effects which Meyerbeer must surely have composed with a view to comfortable conversation. Miss Grunderson was gorgeous in thirty-guineas worth of blue moiré antique *à la Watteau*, and exhibited a small fortune in the way of lace and artificial flowers upon her plump little person. Her diamond earrings were the biggest in the opera-house; though it must be confessed that a straw-coloured tint, which the connoisseur repudi-

ates, pervaded the gems that the market-gardener had bought for his daughter—size, rather than purity of water, being the quality for which Mr. Grunderson selected his diamonds. Nothing could be more striking than the contrast between Maude's simple toilet of white silk and Rosa's gaudy splendour.

But Miss Grunderson was very happy this evening, for the delightful Roderick condescended to talk to her, while his brother was engrossed by Mrs. Tredethlyn. He was not very polite, but Rosa thought him positively charming. She had learnt to understand the emptiness of the attentions that had been paid to her by enterprising young bachelors, who thought that an alliance with the great Grunderson's daughter would be a very pleasant starting-point on the high road of life; but she did not understand that there might come a man wise enough to eschew vain flatteries and all the ordinary allurements of the vulgar fortune-hunter, and yet designing enough to spread his nets for any heiress worthy of his ambition.

In his conversation with the simple-minded Rosa he affected the sentiments of a confirmed misogynist.

"If there were such a possibility as a sensible woman," he said, "I might perhaps hope to end my days in the bosom of a family; but since the age of miracles is past, I resign myself to the idea of remaining a lonely wanderer until the day of my death."

Thus, half in despondency, half in bitterness, Roderick Lowther replied to some leading remark of Miss Grunderson's. She called him a horrid man and a dreadful creature: but she admired him amazingly notwithstanding, and she felt a seraphic happiness in listening to this delightfully cynical being, to the utter neglect of Meyerbeer.

"With the exception of public characters," mused the market-gardener's daughter, "I don't think I was ever *really* in love until now."

And thus it fell out that, when Mrs. Tredethlyn said, in the course of the evening, that she was going to spend the following day at Twickenham, Rosa gave such broad hints about the loveliness of

the weather, and the delights of suburban scenery, that good-natured Maude promised to take her down for a long afternoon among the roses in the dear old garden where so much of her own happy youth had been idled away.

"Are droppers-in to be permitted in your Arcadia, ladies?" demanded Harcourt; "and will the balls and mallets be considered out of place upon the lawn by the river?"

This was quite enough for Miss Grunderson, who cried out directly that of all things in the world she adored croquet, and that "Par" had bought her a set of Cremer's most exquisite walnut-wood balls and mallets. There were times when the vivacious Rosa called her indulgent parent "Par," in spite of those half-dozen annual accounts which he had paid for the young lady's education.

"I shall so enjoy a game of croquet in a real garden!" cried Rosa. "We play it in the square sometimes; but the little boys and the bakers' and butchers' young men outside the rails are so dreadfully trying, especially when the balls won't

go where one wants them, owing to nervousness; and I'm sure it's enough to make any body nervous to have a strange chimney-sweep calling out, 'Well done, butter-fingers!' if one drops a mallet; and *that* square-keeper is never within sight when wanted."

"Does Tredethlyn go with you to-morrow?" asked Harcourt Lowther presently; he had been very thoughtful for the last few minutes.

"No," Maude answered, rather sadly. "I asked Frank to drive me down in the mail phaeton; but he told me he was going a little way out of town on business."

She was thinking how very great a change had come to pass since her husband had been her adoring slave, only too happy to follow wherever she pleased to lead him. Now there was no quarrel, no actual misunderstanding between them; but there was quite a wide breach, as if they had agreed to separate after a long series of domestic battles.

"Roderick and I will come down to the Cedars to-morrow," said Harcourt, bending over Maude's

chair, "unless you forbid us to do so. The river is delightful just now, and you may want the services of a couple of boatmen."

"We shall be very glad to see you, if you like to come," Mrs. Tredethlyn answered, carelessly. Looking up just then, she saw Miss Grunderson's round eyes fixed upon her with a very earnest expression. Rosa had heard all sorts of insinuations respecting Mr. Lowther's constant attendance upon Mrs. Tredethlyn, and the young lady was wondering whether her darling Maude did really deserve any of the reprobation that had been showered upon her as a flirting matron.

"There's a way of saying 'How do you do?' or 'Pretty well, thanks,' that seems like flirting," mused Miss Grunderson; "and Mr. Lowther always has that way when he talks to Mrs. Tredethlyn. I *know* she is too good to be a flirt, in spite of all those malicious people may say about her; and I don't like Harcourt Lowther a bit, for *he* must know how his flirting manner is talked about, though she doesn't. I've seen half-a-dozen opera-glasses turned this way to-night, just because

he's been bending over her chair in that whispering way of his. And yet he has only been talking of croquet."

Rosa's friendship was quite as ardent as her love, and much more lasting. Mrs. Tredethlyn's gentleness had quite subdued that affectionate little heart, and the market-gardener's daughter would have been willing to make any effort in her friend's service. She was a very energetic little girl, with a good deal of that moral courage which is sometimes wanting in more delicate natures. To put the fact in her own words, Rosa was able to speak her mind, and to speak it very freely too, whenever the occasion called for candour.

The next day was one of the brightest in a brilliant July, and Mrs. Tredethlyn's shell-shaped barouche was waiting before the ponderous stuccoed portico at eleven o'clock. Francis had left the house half an hour before on foot, bent on that mysterious expedition a little way out of town which he took so frequently now. Maude and Julia came downstairs at a quarter after eleven; and Miss Grunderson skipped up the stone steps two

minutes afterwards, with the bluest bonnet and the pinkest parasol in London.

"How do you like the new contrast?" she inquired, twirling the pink parasol triumphantly, when she had adjusted her flounces and furbelows to the best of her ability on the front seat of Mrs. Tredethlyn's carriage. "I remember, when I was at school, pink and blue together were thought bad taste, but now they're quite *de rigger*. Ness pas ker say joli dong? s'p'tite ombrelle?" demanded Miss Grunderson, bursting into French. "Vingt-huit shillings, ma chère! Ness pas très-cher, chère? Et le boutiquier ne voudrait pas prendre un six-sous là dessous, quoique je l'ai marchandé comme un juif," she added, with a slap-dash rendering of the language which was peculiar to her.

The summer day was delightful, and Maude's spirits, which had been rather depressed of late, rose with the sunshine and the pure air, as the high-stepping bays left Stuccoville behind them for the pleasant country road, and the rustic odours of suburban gardens. And then, when

she found herself amongst her own birds and flower-beds, it was hard to believe that she was no longer a girl, with a girl's careless happiness in beautiful things. She sat under a great drooping willow, whose lowest branches dipped into the water, and watched her dogs gambolling with Rosa on the grass.

"I was like that once," she thought, "before I knew of papa's difficulties—before I sold myself for money. I fancied that it was a heroic thing to marry the man I did not love, in the hope that my esteem might be some poor repayment of his generous devotion—his noble trust in my father. But I know now that I could do him no baser wrong than become his wife. I know it now, when he himself has learnt to despise and to avoid me, even when I am anxious to win back his regard."

Yes, it had come to this. Maude Tredethlyn deeply felt her husband's palpable avoidance of her. So long as he had been slavishly devoted, she had been just a little inclined to despise him; but now that the treasure of an honest man's love

seemed to have slipped away from her, she awoke to the consciousness that it was a treasure, and that she had need to be unhappy in the loss of a jewel that is not given to every woman to possess. She sickened at the thought of the wealth which her marriage had given her, now that it was unsanctified by the love of the giver. Was it gone, that devoted affection which she had held so lightly while it was hers to throw away? She began to understand now how delicate a thing a heart is, even when it beats beneath the rudest breast, and how soon it withers under the blighting influence of disdain. Yes, she had been faithfully loved by an honest man who would have given his very life for her happiness, and she had trifled with his love until it was lost. Queen Guinivere has only one set of diamonds to throw into the river; and when the passion has past in whose hot impulse she flung them away, the lady is apt to regret her lost jewels.

Miss Desmond and Miss Grunderson trifled with the balls and mallets, while Maude wandered listlessly on the terrace thinking of the breach

between herself and her husband. She was still lingering there alone, when Harcourt and Roderick Lowther strolled from the drawing-room on to the lawn. The elder set about instructing Julia Desmond and Miss Grunderson with regard to the latest and most intricate bye-laws of croquet; and the younger made his way at once to the terrace where Maude was walking listlessly and slowly under a coquettish white umbrella.

Harcourt Lowther took care that Mrs. Tredethlyn had no more time for solitary musing. He brought all his talents to bear to keep her amused, and by the aid of fashionable small-talk, sharp little criticisms on new books, croquet, luncheon, and an incursion among Mr. Hillary's hothouses, he contrived to chase the shadow of care quite away from the young wife's girlish brow. It was about four o'clock, and the afternoon had lapsed into a sultry sleepy brightness that was almost oppressive even in that green retreat beside the river, when the two gentlemen suggested the water.

"Of all things in the world the most de-

lightful!" screamed Miss Grunderson. "Oh, do please take us out in one of those darling little dangerous-looking boats I saw in the Swiss boat-house down there. And oh, what a pity I didn't wear a hat instead of this odious blue bonnet, which is beginning to fly already!" said Rosa, looking despondently at the expansive ribbons fluttering below her double chin, which had lost some little of their azure intensity under the influence of the July sun. To Miss Grunderson's great delight, the two gentlemen proceeded forthwith to the boat-house, and lowered a couple of wherries, as perfect in their way as any craft that ever came out of the hands of Messrs. Messenger. Harcourt placed Mrs. Tredethlyn and Julia Desmond in one of these boats, and to the other descended Miss Grunderson, with more small shrieks of terror and feminine skirmishing, and a greater display of Balmoral boots and embroidered flounces than was absolutely necessary to the embarkation.

"I never get into a boat without thinking I shall be drowned," said Rosa, plumping down upon the cushions, and all but upsetting herself

at the first start; "the water does give way so. But if one *was* drowned, it would be rather nice to have a paragraph all to one's self in the daily newspapers, or perhaps what 'pa calls a social leader, beginning with something about the Moloch Pleasure having swallowed another victim, and Youth at the prow and Pleasure at the helm, and the Pale Horse, and so on."

And then Miss Grunderson, finding herself quite alone with the latest object of her adoration, exerted all her small fascinations to beguile the woman-hater from his stern aversion to her sex. She chattered as gaily as some talking-bird; and Roderick Lowther, who imagined that he had by this time established himself firmly as a disinterested individual, condescended to make himself agreeable, and to drift into that pleasant current of meaningless small-talk which malicious people call flirtation.

While Roderick rowed his fair companion swiftly past the verdant bank, Harcourt let his boat drift slowly down with the current, only dipping his oars now and then in the intervals of

his discourse. Maude had forgotten her troubled reverie upon the terrace, and gave herself up to the enjoyment of all the old talk about books and music, poetry and painting, which had been so delicious to her in those departed days when she and Harcourt had drifted down that same river plighted husband and wife. There is no monitor so sharp as rural nature when we have need to be reminded of our inconstancy. Looking at those reedy banks, those tranquil gardens sloping to a tranquil tide, Maude found it almost difficult to believe in the changes of her life since she had first floated down that stream, a child, with wild flowers in her lap, and her little bare arm hanging across the edge of the boat, for the infantile pleasure of splashing.

Harcourt Lowther found his brother's boat moored to a little quay in a shady corner of the river below the Star-and-Garter, and the splendid colouring of Miss Grunderson's toilette made that young lady conspicuous as she ascended a little pathway sloping upwards to the terrace, attended by her cavalier. Harcourt shipped his oars, and

proposed a stroll in the Petersham meadows. Maude looked at her watch; it was a quarter to five, and Mr. Hillary's dinner-hour was half-past seven. There was plenty of time for a stroll across those verdant meadows; and Mrs. Tredethlyn, having the interval to dispose of somehow, had only to choose in wasting it in this way or in some other fashion. Harcourt had his wish, therefore. He assisted the two ladies to disembark, gave his coat into the custody of one of the lounging watermen at the rustic landing-stage, and then strolled with his two companions into the meadows leading towards Petersham.

There is little need to tell the English reader what Petersham is like. Almost every body knows that rural cluster of modern villas and grand old red brick mansions nestling so comfortably under the shadow of Richmond Hill. Surely the next best thing to inhabiting Earl Russell's house in Richmond Park, or that magic château of Monsieur Fould's, hidden deep in the woody heart of grand old Saint Germain's, would be to own one of those Georgian mansions at Petersham, with

cool fishponds and shady gardens, long ranges of narrow windows and a marble-paved vestibule, with a ceiling by Thornhill, and old family portraits by polite Sir Joshua himself. It was the afternoon of afternoons for listless dawdling about such a place as Petersham, and Mr. Lowther and the two ladies were alike enthusiastic in their admiration of the Georgian mansions.

"I wish Francis would buy a nice old house down here," said Maude. "I am so tired of London; it is all the same thing over, and over, and over again; the same flock of sheep jumping through the same gap in the same hedge, and not one of them—no, not even the leader—knowing why they do it. I should be near papa here, and all my old friends. In town I seem to know every body, and yet not to have a single friend."

There was a rustic bench in the lane through which they were walking as Maude said this. The two ladies sat down to rest for a few minutes, and Harcourt Lowther took out his cigar-case.

"I shall leave you just long enough to smoke

a cigarette," he said, "and then I will take you back to the water-side by a still prettier road, if you like."

He went away at a leisurely pace, lighting his cigar as he went; but he walked a good deal faster when he was out of Maude Tredethlyn's ken, and he was flushed with heat when he returned after a quarter of an hour's absence.

"Now, ladies," he said, "if we are not to keep Mr. Hillary waiting for his dinner, it is high time for us to go back to the boat."

Maude and Julia rose, and the little party strolled into the road at the end of the lane in the straggling order usual to people who walk for their own pleasure in a country village. Mrs. Tredethlyn's white umbrella was a little way ahead of her companions, when Harcourt Lowther laid his gloved hand lightly upon Julia's shoulder.

She looked up at him, startled by the gesture.

"You have had some reason to complain of your friend Miss Hillary and Francis Tredethlyn," he said. "I am going to give you your revenge."

Julia stared in amazement at the speaker; but he did not wait to be interrogated.

"Come, Mrs. Tredethlyn," he said, "your papa will have to wait for his dinner unless you walk a little faster."

He had not much reason to complain of Maude, who had been ahead of him until this moment, but he hurried her along the dusty road until, at a spot where it curved round to the river, he stopped suddenly, pointing to a cottage-garden, seen through the iron rails of a high old-fashioned gate set in a framework of clematis.

"Look at that, Mrs. Tredethlyn! Isn't it a pretty picture?"

It was a little rustic *tableau* composed of two figures grouped under a mulberry-tree,—a delicate-looking woman, with soft brown hair, touched here and there with a glimmer of gold, seated on a rustic bench. Her face was turned away from the road, and she was looking up at a man who leaned against the trunk of the tree. It was only a glimpse of this picture which Maude caught between the iron scroll-work of the gate, but she saw quite enough.

The man was Francis Tredethlyn.

"Great Heaven!" exclaimed Harcourt Lowther, in an audible whisper; "it *is* Francis!"

Maude looked at him with a vague alarm in her face, which had grown almost as white as the umbrella that sheltered it. Harcourt's whisper had frightened her a hundredfold more than the sight of her husband, at home in that unknown garden with a woman she had never seen or heard of.

"Who is that lady?" she asked, when they had passed the gate. "Do you know her, Mr. Lowther? You know all my husband's associates much better than I do."

She tried to speak quite calmly, but failed miserably in the effort. Harcourt's whisper had expressed so much.

"No, I do not know the lady," he answered, gravely. "I think you had better make no inquiries about her. Mr. Tredethlyn did not tell you that he was to spend the day at Petersham?"

"No. He only said that he was going a little way out of town."

"Then in that case it will be better for you to leave him to finish his day as he pleases, since you have made no arrangement for meeting him here, and do not know the lady."

Maude did not answer him just then. She walked on a little faster than before; and Harcourt kept by her side, looking furtively every now and then at the pale profile, the tremulous lower lip. He could see that Mrs. Tredethlyn was profoundly agitated, and that she was trying to conceal her agitation. He could see this; and he was determined to make her speak, and speak freely.

"She is not the sort of woman to suffer in silence," he thought. "This kind of trouble is new to her, and she will cry out presently."

Mr. Lowther was not very much at fault in his estimate of Maude's heroism. She spoke to him when they were a few paces from Julia, whose face was lighted by a look of triumph under her gauzy veil.

"You say you do not know that lady. You must at least know who she is?"

This was said in a tone of almost piteous entreaty.

"Upon my honour, no," Harcourt answered, gravely.

There was a pause for some moments. They were in one of the meadows by this time, nearing the water's edge, Julia still in the rear, and Maude still walking very fast, as it is the habit of most people to walk under the influence of agitation. Perhaps in that unreasoning, unnecessary haste there lurks a vague fancy that we can hurry *away* from our trouble.

All at once Maude turned to Harcourt Lowther, and laid her hand upon his arm.

"Tell me what it all means," she cried,—"tell me the worst, however bad it is. I know that you are hiding something from me. I know by your manner just now that there is some horrible meaning in Frank's presence in that garden with that woman."

"My dear Mrs. Tredethlyn, you ask me to interfere in a matter which I have no right to approach. It may be every thing to you where

your husband goes,—whom he associates with. I have been his friend,—for your sake; and I have done my best to steer him clear of dangerous acquaintance and dangerous amusements—still for your sake. I may have found it a hard matter to keep him out of mischief, and may have regretted the natural tendencies of his character—always for your sake. Beyond this I can have nothing to do with him. I had good reason for being sorry when you married him—on my own account. Of late I have been even more sorry—on yours."

Maude looked at him, white and trembling. The schemer was pleased to see what deadly mischief had been done, and yet stung to the very heart to find that any falsehood of his victim's could wound so deeply. There are triumphs which have a shadow of humiliation upon their brightness, and this was one of them. Julia, seeing that her companions were loitering, seated herself on the lower step of a stile. She had no desire to interrupt this conversation.

"Speak to me plainly," Mrs. Tredethlyn cried,

passionately, "or I will go back to that cottage and ask my husband himself for an explanation. Perhaps that would be best. He has a better right to explain his conduct than any one else."

She walked a few paces from her companion; but Harcourt Lowther followed her, and caught her gently by the arm.

"Will Francis Tredethlyn tell you the truth if you question him?" he asked. "My dear Mrs. Tredethlyn, how could you endure the *esclandre* of such a scene as *must* ensue if you go back to that house, and confront your husband in the presence of that woman?"

"Why should there be a scene, or any *esclandre?* The lady may be the wife or daughter of some friend of my husband's. Have I any right to imagine something horrible because I see Frank with a person who is a stranger to me? It was only your manner that frightened me."

"I am very sorry my manner was so foolish. Let us drop the subject. Only—take my advice—don't go back to that house."

"Why should I not, if my husband is innocent? as I am sure he is."

Mr. Lowther shrugged his shoulders.

"Because it is an unpleasant thing to intrude where one is not invited," he answered. "Whatever questions you wish to ask your husband can be reserved until you are both at home; and in the mean time pray let the matter drop. Believe me, it is not a fit subject for discussion between you and me."

There are lawyers who generally inaugurate a consultation by advising their clients not to go to law. They know it is a very safe display of magnanimity. It is only the old story of standing on the shore to reason with a tempestuous ocean, or interfering with the appetite of a famished wolf in favour of the lamb on which he means to dine. To try to restrain a woman whose jealousy has once been aroused from any investigation of her fancied wrongs, is no less wasted labour; and Harcourt Lowther knew quite enough of human nature to be very sure of this.

Mrs. Tredethlyn turned upon him fiercely. He

had never seen the woman he loved in a passion until this moment: and though he had so much else to employ his thoughts just now, he could not help pausing for a moment to think how beautiful she looked with that new light in her eyes, that feverish glow so suddenly kindled in the cheeks that had been deadly pale.

"I will not let the matter drop," she cried. "You are keeping some hideous secret hidden from me. I know you are. I could not be mistaken in your tone just now when you saw Francis in that garden. If there were no harm in his being there, why should you express such amazement? Harcourt Lowther, we were friends once, and you affect to be my friend now. If you are what you pretend to be, tell me the meaning of my husband's conduct."

"You love him very much, Maude, to feel his conduct so deeply."

She was too agitated to notice that her old lover had called her by her Christian name. He had perhaps been scarcely aware of it himself. He loved her better at this moment than he had

ever loved her in his life, now that she stood before him a beautiful, angry, passionate creature, appealing to him against the husband for whose sake he had been jilted.

"You must be very much in love with your husband," he repeated, bitterly; "and yet I should have scarcely thought it possible you could care for that sort of person."

"He *is* my husband," answered Maude, "and I have a right to be angry if he does me any wrong."

"I acknowledge your right to be as angry as you please, but I am sorry to see you so agitated. I am very sorry we happened to walk this way."

"Will you tell me the truth? I have appealed to you by our old friendship. I shall never again believe in you as a friend unless you speak plainly to-day."

"If you say *that*, you oblige me to speak. Will you take my arm, and walk up and down by the hedge yonder? I see people coming into the meadow, and we look rather conspicuous standing just here."

Mrs. Tredethlyn accepted the proffered arm. Harcourt Lowther was silent for some moments, while they strolled slowly under the shadow of a tall hawthorn hedge. He was waiting until Maude should have recovered some little calmness, and be in a condition to appreciate the full value of what he was going to say.

"It would be going over very old ground, and awakening very bitter recollections—on my part, at least," he began at last, in a subdued and pensive tone, "were I to tell you what I thought of your marriage with Francis Tredethlyn. When I thought of it most mildly, I believed it the maddest sacrifice that was ever made to the Moloch Wealth since this world began. You had your reasons, you told me, and they were very powerful reasons, but they were to be kept a secret. I had no more to say. All I could do was to hope that you might not be utterly miserable with the man you married—to my mind, the man of all others least adapted to make you a happy wife. I should have done well had I been wise enough to keep aloof from you and your husband after

that unhappy marriage. I was so mad as to hang about your house, and accept the friendship of my rival, in the belief that I might save the vessel wherein you had embarked from some of those rocks which I saw a little ahead of the calm bay whence you sailed, with all the stereotyped paraphernalia of pennants flying and guns firing. I *have* saved you from a good deal; but I have not been able to change your husband's nature, and he has taken his own way in spite of me."

"What do you mean?" Maude demanded, breathlessly.

"I cannot, and will not, enter into the details of Francis Tredethlyn's life for the last twelve months. No, Maude, not even your entreaties shall wring from me more than I have a right to tell, or you to hear. And if I spoke the plainest words that ever sullied a woman's ear, I should only be talking a strange language which would convey no meaning to your innocent mind. There are places in London whose names you have never heard in your life—places whose very existence might never be known to honest people if men

did not write about them in the newspapers; and amongst the *habitués* of those places your husband has been conspicuous since the first week of his return from the village where you and he spent your honeymoon. There are dinners given, up at that hotel yonder, to women whose costume is an extravagant copy of yours, but who in every thing except their dress differ from you as entirely as darkness differs from light; and Francis Tredethlyn has been foremost amongst the dinner-givers ever since he has had a fortune to squander. So long as he was amused by open follies and dissipations I cherished a lingering hope that custom would bring weariness, and that the very monotony of these poisonous pleasures would render them their own antidote. I made excuses for the man who had so newly succeeded to a fortune large enough to intoxicate a weak brain; and I fancied when the novelty of his wealth had ceased to bewilder him, he would awake to a bitter sense of the degrading path in which he was treading. I thought this, Maude, and I believed also that your loveliness, your purity, rendered all the more

obvious by contrast with the people among whom he wasted his life, must lure him back to your side. How could I think otherwise than this?—*I*, who had loved and lost you!"

It never occurred to Mrs. Tredethlyn that these were the very last words that Harcourt Lowther should have spoken to her, at this moment above all other moments. It seemed as if she scarcely heard this allusion to the past, any more than she had heard her old lover's frequent utterance of her Christian name.

"I think my husband loved me—once," she murmured, in a low sorrowful voice. "He was so noble in his conduct—so generous to my father."

"My poor girl," exclaimed Harcourt, with supreme compassion, "how should *you* know the difference between a good man's generosity and a profligate's lavish bid for the fair young bride who happens to be the fancy of the moment? There are men who will give as exaggerated a price for a picture as ever Francis Tredethlyn offered when he won you for his wife; but you

would scarcely call a man 'generous' because he bid extravagantly for a Raffaelle or a Murillo at Christie's. There is no creature in this world so selfish as a profligate."

Maude turned sick and cold to the very heart as Mr. Lowther said this.

A profligate! The horrible word wounded her like the stroke of a knife. In a moment this innocent girl, who until now had only known the existence of "profligacy" as an unspeakable noun substantive hidden away somewhere in the close columns of unexpurgated dictionaries, felt the veil rudely torn from the purity of her mind; and was told that her husband—that other part of herself, united to her by the solemn service of the Church—was the obnoxious thing which until this hour no one had ever dared to name in her presence. The generosity she had believed in was a sham. The noble nature which had commanded her regard and esteem, even when it could not win her love, had never existed out of her own imagination. She had been wronged, betrayed, humiliated; while in her schoolgirl simplicity she

had been lamenting her unworthiness of a devoted husband's love. She had been bought for money like a slave in some Oriental market-place, when she had imagined herself a free sacrifice offered as the recompense of a sacred debt.

She did not speak; but looking at her face Harcourt Lowther saw that his words had gone home. The breach between husband and wife yawned wide enough now. The undermining of the ground had been slow, laborious work, but the result repaid this social engineer for all his trouble. With what a crash the earth fell in when it was time for the convulsion! So some huge mass of Kentish chalk, which sappers and miners have been manipulating for a month or so, and at which a crowd of tired spectators have been straining hopelessly for two hours at a stretch, breaks away all at once from the bosom of the cliff with a thunderous noise, and crumbles into powder.

But Mr. Lowther had not finished yet.

"I thought I could win you back your husband, Maude, and restore him to you a better

man," he said; "but I soon discovered how futile such a hope was. I have been by his side in scenes that were horribly repugnant to my own nature, in order that I might hold him back from the verge of deeper gulfs than those into which he had already fallen. Within the last few months I have known that he kept a secret from me, and I knew that it must be a disgraceful one. Only a few days ago it came to my knowledge that he had lately furnished a house somewhere in the suburbs. This gave me a clue to those mysterious absences, those journeys on business a little way out of town, about which your husband had been so reticent. Men of Francis Tredethlyn's calibre do not furnish houses from benevolent motives. I had no means of knowing where the house was,—how little could I imagine that it was in this neighbourhood, or that accident would lead our footsteps to its very threshold! Mrs. Tredethlyn, you shall not wring another word from me. I am sorry that you have tempted me to tell you so much," exclaimed Mr. Harcourt, who had said all he wanted to say.

It was a long time before Maude answered him; and then she said, very slowly, and with a painful effort,

"I thank you—for having told me the truth. It is always best to know the truth."

CHAPTER V.

ROSA'S REVELATIONS.

AFTER this there was no more said between Harcourt Lowther and Mrs. Tredethlyn upon the subject of her husband's delinquencies. They walked slowly back to the stile, where Julia was sitting as quietly as if she had been that monumental Patience of whom the poet has told us. There is something wonderfully expressive in natural pantomime; and Miss Desmond, sitting on that rustic stile tracing figures from Euclid on the dusty pathway under her feet with the ivory point of her parasol, had yet contrived to keep a sharp watch upon those two people on the other side of the meadow, and to form a tolerably clear idea as to the gist of their conversation.

"Julia dear," Maude said wearily, as they

walked to the river-side, "would you mind going back to town as soon as we can get to the carriage? I have such an intolerable headache, that I'm sure I shall be quite unfit to dine with papa."

Of course Julia declared that dining in London or at the Cedars was equally indifferent to her. It was very often her humour to affect the dull characterless manner of a paid dependant; and it was her humour to do so just now.

"I am afraid Mr. Lowther and I have kept you waiting an unconscionable time," said Maude, looking at her watch.

"Not at all," replied Miss Desmond; "I rather like waiting."

Roderick Lowther and Miss Grunderson were loitering at the little landing-stage; the young lady's showy draperies pre-Raffaelite in the sharp edges which she exhibited against the hot blue sky.

"Oh, you darling Mrs. Tredethlyn!" exclaimed Rosa; "I thought you *never were* coming. If your pa is half as particular about his

dinner as mine is, won't he be cross with us all! It's close upon seven o'clock!"

Maude looked piteously at Harcourt Lowther. He understood that appealing glance.

"I have given Mrs. Tredethlyn a violent headache by putting her in an awningless boat under a broiling sun," he said, "and then beguiling her into a fatiguing walk; and I deserve to be horsewhipped for my stupidity. If you have any regard for your friend's health, Miss Grunderson, you will forego the pleasure of dining with Mr. Hillary, and get her home as quietly as you can."

Rosa Grunderson might be silly, but she was by no means stupid; and, looking at Maude's ashen face, she saw that something more than a headache had caused the change in her friend. She saw this; and that vague distrust which she felt about the brother of the man she adored shaped itself into a positive dislike.

"That Mr. Lowther has been saying something to annoy her," thought Miss Grunderson; "and I hate him. What business has he to be

always dancing attendance upon her instead of her husband? And now he's not content with getting her talked about, so he must needs go and make her unhappy, poor darling."

Thus mused the meditative Rosa, while Roderick Lowther rowed her homeward over the placid water. The diplomatist's fascinations were almost thrown away upon her during this brief journey from Richmond to the Cedars, although he had progressed so far in Miss Grunderson's affections during a leisurely promenade on the terrace, that he had serious thoughts of calling on Grunderson *père* within the week to make a formal offer for the young lady's hand and fortune.

"I have no idea of wasting my time and trouble upon the girl, to find myself thrown out at the last moment by an impracticable parent," thought Roderick, as he shot through the water with that long deliberate stroke for which the Oxonians are celebrated. "I must know exactly where I am, before I devote myself to the plump Rosa. There must be no nonsense about

settlements, and so forth. I won't have any legal brick wall and *chevaux de frise* between me and my wife's fortune. A man doesn't quarter a cabbage with the arms of the oldest untitled family in Hampshire without getting well paid for the humiliation. I must understand what I'm going in for, when I propose to my charming Rosa."

Lionel Hillary was in the drawing-room when the water-party returned to the Cedars; but he accepted his daughter's assurance that she was too tired and too ill to dine with him, and escorted her to her carriage as soon as it was ready for her. Maude was quite composed now, and there was no suspicion of the truth aroused in the merchant's mind when he kissed her and bade her good-bye.

"It was foolish of you to go on the water in the hottest part of the day, darling," he said; "and I'm afraid you are going out a little too much in town; but the season will soon be over, and I suppose you will be leaving London."

Mrs. Tredethlyn murmured something unintelligible, and the barouche rolled away. She

saw her father and the two Lowthers standing on the wide stone steps dimly through a mist, athwart which the group seemed only a confusion of familiar faces and dark garments; and then she found herself driving Londonwards through the still evening, with Julia by her side, and Rosa's anxious face opposite to her.

She accepted unquestioningly all that Harcourt Lowther had told her. Her husband was false to her. There was so much in Francis Tredethlyn's life since his marriage which seemed an evidence of his accuser's truth. And then Harcourt had not wished to accuse. The cruel revelation had been extorted from him. No trouble that Maude had ever yet endured had been so bitter as that which had come upon her to-day,—the shame, the humiliation, the unutterable horror of that discovery made in the summer sunshine, amidst the perfume of flowers, the joyous carolling of a skylark high up in the warm blue sky. She did not love her husband; and the agony which gnawed her breast during this homeward journey was the sharp pang which belongs

to wounded pride rather than to betrayed affection. At least this was what she said to herself, as she remembered, with an angry flush upon her brow, those sneering remarks of Mr. Lowther's about her love for such a man as Francis Tredethlyn.

"I do believe he loved me once, let Harcourt Lowther say what he will; and he was nobly generous to my father; and now he deserts me altogether, and devotes himself to some horrible woman!" thought Mrs. Tredethlyn, whose ideas were not particularly sequential this evening.

She meditated upon so much as she knew of the life that Francis had led since the close of his honeymoon. His late hours, his frequent absences, all seemed to confirm Harcourt's account of dissipated habits and degraded tastes.

Yes, every thing combined to prove the miserable truth. She was a neglected wife; abandoned by the man who had once seemed the veriest slave that ever bowed beneath the supreme dominion of Love. She remembered what he had been, or what she had believed him to be, and was all the

more indignant with him for the discoveries of to-day. Rosa Grunderson, anxiously watching Mrs. Tredethlyn in the twilight, wondered that so dark a cloud could overshadow the fair face of her friend.

"It must be something very dreadful," thought Rosa; "but whatever it is, that Mr. Lowther is at the bottom of it. If Roderick does propose,—which I've every reason to think he will, from the way he conducted himself on the terrace,—and he and pa can come to any arrangement about me, I won't have much to do with my brother-in-law, that's certain, for I hate him. But I daresay those horrid ground-rents will always stand in the way of my being married to any body but a Rothschild; and Rothschilds don't trouble *themselves* about ground-rents."

The drive from Twickenham to Stuccoville is not a very long one; and Mrs. Tredethlyn's bays got over the ground at a pace that did credit to the judgment of Mr. Lowther, who had chosen the horses for his friend. It was nearly nine o'clock when the barouche drew up before the

Doric colonnade which imparted a funereal darkness to Maude's dining-room; and before the three ladies could alight, a hansom cab dashed up to the curbstone, a pair of slamming doors were flung open, and Francis Tredethlyn sprang out upon the pavement.

His wife's face flushed crimson, and then grew deadly pale. She turned to Rosa Grunderson, and murmured in faint, broken accents:

"Will you dine with us, Rosa? or shall Martin drive you home?"

"Thank you, darling," Miss Grunderson answered promptly; "I think I'll come in for just a few moments. Pa will have gone to the Bell and—to his club by this time," added Rosa, whose parent was wont to spend his evenings in the parlour of a very respectable tavern in the Brompton Road, where he and several other worthies assembled nightly to discuss the affairs of the nation amidst the fumes of their cigars, the primitive clay being strictly tabooed in that select little coterie.

Maude alighted and entered the hall. Francis

had handed her from the carriage, and followed her into the house. He threw away his cigar as he stepped into the hall, and approached his wife radiant with good spirits and perfumed with tobacco.

"I'm so glad you've come home," he said. "I thought you were going to dine with the governor, and that I should have to sit in that dreary room all by myself, with only Landseer's stag-hounds to keep me company: though if half the people one calls company were as much alive as *they* are, a dinner-party wouldn't be such a dismal business as it is. Of course you haven't dined; no more have I; and unfortunately there doesn't seem to be any dinner," added Mr. Tredethlyn, as he opened the door and looked into the dining-room, where the table was blank and ghastly under a faint glimmer of gas. "No one was expected, I suppose? However, they can get us something. Geoffreys, just see about dinner, will you? How do you do, Miss Grunderson? I daresay you're hungry after your drive. Are you going upstairs, Maude?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Tredethlyn. The syllable had a startling effect as it fell from her lips, like one solitary drop of hail falling suddenly on a summer day.

"I am going upstairs," said Miss Desmond confidentially to Rosa; "will you come with me, and take off your things?"

"No, thanks, dear," answered Miss Grunderson, who would have endured tortures rather than say "thank you," when fashion required that she should say "thanks." "I don't think I *will* take off my things. Mrs. Tredethlyn doesn't seem very well; and it's almost too late for dinner; so I think I'll just go up to the morning-room, and rest for a few minutes before I go home. The carriage needn't be kept, you know, please," added Miss Grunderson, to a male domestic hovering in the shadowy depths of the hall; "for I can have a cab fetched when I want to go."

Mr. Tredethlyn had followed his wife to the drawing-rooms; and the two girls standing at the foot of the staircase heard one of the doors close with a sonorous bang.

Miss Desmond went upstairs, and Miss Grunderson followed slowly. The morning-room of which Rosa had spoken was on the second floor; but the young lady did not go any further than the first landing-place. The door of the front drawing-room was closed, but the door of the back drawing-room stood wide open; and peering into the lighted apartment, Rosa saw that it was quite empty. She paused for a moment, looked about her; and then went quietly into the back drawing-room, and closed the door very softly behind her.

Francis Tredethlyn followed his wife to the drawing-room because that one frozen syllable, together with the strange expression of her face, had been quite enough to tell him that something was wrong. This husband and this wife had never quarrelled. There had been between them none of those little stormy passages which are apt to interrupt the serenity of the best-regulated households; and the Cornishman's heart turned cold with the thought that any thing like ill-feeling

could arise between himself and Maude. The altered expression of her face boded so much; and yet what could arise to displease her, when he was nothing but her devoted slave, ready to obey her commands, willing to lay down his very life for her pleasure?

"Maude," he said, as he closed the drawing-room door, "you speak to me and look at me as if you were offended. And yet I have no consciousness of having done any thing to displease you."

Mrs. Tredethlyn looked at her husband with supreme contempt; not the cool scorn which is akin to indifference, but rather a passionate disdainfulness. Taking into consideration the fact that Maude did not care for her husband, all this feminine rage seemed a sad waste of feeling.

"Do not add hypocrisy to the wrong that you have done me," said Mrs. Tredethlyn. "I have been most cruelly awakened this day to a knowledge of the life you have been leading — ever since our marriage. I cannot speak of this subject; it is too horrible; I think the words would choke me. I thought that I should have been

able to write what I had to tell you; but since I have been so unfortunate as to meet you, I may as well say with my own lips what I meant to have said in a letter. It is very little. I have only to tell you that from this moment we must be strangers to each other. After my discoveries of to-day, I should consider myself a base and degraded creature if I ever suffered your hand to touch mine in friendship again. The obligation of my father's debt to you must rest upon him henceforward, and not upon me."

"But, Maude, explain yourself!—your discovery of to-day, you say! What discovery?"

"Your affectation of unconsciousness is a deeper insult than your—No, I will *not* discuss this subject with you!" cried Maude, passionately. "It is shameful—it is cruel—that I should have been wronged so basely, when I trusted you so completely. Do not speak to me; do not touch me!" she exclaimed, shrinking away from him with a shudder; "your presence inspires me with disgust and abhorrence. Why do you make any poor pretence of inhabiting this house,

which has only afforded you an ostensible shelter, while your amusements and your friends have been found elsewhere? I set you free from this hour, Mr. Tredethlyn. Seek for happiness after your own fashion; where you please. I have nothing more to say to you."

She swept from the room before her husband could arrest her. Unspeakably bewildered by her passionate words, which were almost meaningless to him, Francis Tredethlyn stood motionless as a statue a few paces from the doorway by which his wife had just left him. He was standing thus when the voluminous curtains which were drawn across the archway between the drawing-rooms were cautiously divided, and a plump little figure in blue muslin appeared among the amber drapery. The Cornishman heard the rustling, and turned abruptly towards the *portière*.

"Yes," exclaimed Miss Grunderson, "it's me; no, it's I!—but, goodness gracious, what *does* it matter about grammar, when there's so much trouble in the world?—yes, and I've been listening," continued the young lady, answering Mr. Tre-

dethlyn's inquiring stare; "and I know that listening in a general way is considered mean; but I think the amount of pa's ground-rents ought to exempt me from any imputation of meanness. If I didn't love that sweet lamb so dearly; and if I hadn't a very sincere regard for you, Mr. Tredethlyn,—having come into money suddenly myself, and knowing how trying it is to carry it off carelessly, and not look as if one was always conscious of being richer than other people; if I didn't—in short, I shouldn't have stopped behind those curtains, and run the risk of being considered a sneak and a listener. But do say that you forgive me, please, and believe that I meant it for the best?" pleaded Rosa, whose diction was apt to become rather obscure under the influence of excitement.

"What, in Heaven's name, does it all mean, Miss Grunderson?" asked Francis piteously.

He was ready to cling to the frailest spar by which he might float on the wide ocean of perplexity, whose billows had so suddenly encompassed him.

"Goodness gracious knows—*I* don't any more than the dead though if there *is* any thing in drawing-room tables balancing themselves on tip-toe and greatcoats flying about the room like awkward birds the dead may know more than we give them credit for," exclaimed the lively Rosa, without a single stop; "but it's very certain there is something wrong, and whatever it is, that Mr. Lowther is at the bottom of it."

"Harcourt Lowther?"

"Yes. My pa hears a great deal of gossip at the Bell and—at clubs, and such places; and he always tells me every thing he hears. And oh, Mr. Tredethlyn, if you knew how long I have wished to speak my mind to you, I am sure you would forgive me for listening just now."

"My dear Miss Grunderson, what could you have to say to me?" asked the bewildered Cornishman.

"Oh, lots of things. But then you know the grand maxim in society is that you *mustn't* speak your mind. It's like that Latin person's rule of nil thingamy; you mustn't admire any thing,

you know; and so on. And one must unlearn all one's Catechism, about loving one's neighbour as oneself, and doing unto others as one would they should—which always reminds me of a winter Sunday afternoon at school and broken chilblains, because one *did* break once while I was saying it. And you see in society the thing is to let your neighbour go his way and to go yours, and to say, 'Bless my soul! exactly as I anticipated; paw creatchaw!' if your neighbour tumbles over a precipice, from which it would be the very worst of bad manners to hold him back; and in society, if you saw the good Samaritan—no, the other person—lying wounded in the road, it would be a dreadful *incon*—what it's name?—to pick him up and take him to an inn and pay for his lodging, because he might call you to account for your impertinent officiousness as soon as he got well. So, though I've been bursting to speak my mind almost ever since I've known you, Mr. Tredethlyn, I've held my tongue until to-night. But to-night the climax has come, and I *must* speak. Oh, you poor dear thing!" cried Rosa, in a sudden outburst of sym-

pathy, "how you and your wife have been talked about!"

"Talked about!—by whom, when, and where?"

"By every body, always, every where. You don't know—though you ought to know, if you ever listened to what was going on around you—how people *do* talk. They've talked about your dissipation, the hours you have kept, the places you have been seen at, the people you have been seen with; about your coming home in hansom cabs in the middle of the night; and I think if quieter vehicles could be invented for people who stay out late, or at least the doors made to open differently, there wouldn't *be* so much scandal. They've talked about your getting *tipsy*," exclaimed Rosa, shaking her head solemnly, and laying a tremendous stress upon the obnoxious word; "and they've said you were drinking yourself into an early grave, and that Harcourt Lowther was leading you on to your death in order that he might marry your wife afterwards."

"Harcourt lead me—to my death—and—marry Maude! oh, no, no, no; it is too horri-

ble!" gasped Francis, staring at Miss Grunderson, with his head clasped in his hands, and big beads of perspiration upon his brow.

"I know it is," answered Rosa; "but they say it; and you must own it was not a wise thing for you to be so very intimate with a man who was engaged to your wife before you married her."

"Engaged to my wife! *Who* was engaged to my wife?"

"Why Harcourt Lowther, of course! Didn't you know all about it?"

"No, so help me Heaven!"

Miss Grunderson looked very grave. All that she had said had been spoken in perfect good faith; but, all at once, she began to see that mischief might come of this free utterance of her thoughts.

"I thought that you knew it," she stammered, in considerable confusion, "or I'm sure I should never have said one word about—"

"How did *you* come to know it?" asked Francis, turning fiercely upon the terrified Rosa.

"Miss Desmond told me."

"It is a lie, a malicious lie, invented by Julia Desmond!"

"I daresay it *is* something in the way of a story," responded Miss Grunderson, who was very anxious to extinguish the sudden conflagration which her unconscious hand had fired; "people *do* tell such stories, you know; not that I think Miss Desmond would speak so positively unless—but I'm sure if Mrs. Tredethlyn *was* ever engaged to Mr. Lowther, she had quite forgotten him when she married you; only, *if* it was so, I don't think it was quite honourable of him to be so friendly with you without telling you all about it."

Thus Miss Grunderson—floundering helplessly in a conversational quagmire — endeavoured to undo any mischief which her indiscretion might have made. But Francis was not listening to her; he was thinking of all his life during the last year, and a host of trifling circumstances recurred to his mind, in evidence against the wife he had loved, and the friend he had trusted.

"Yes," he thought, as he sank moodily down

into the nearest chair, and covered his face with his hands, as heedless of Miss Grunderson's presence as if that young lady had been one of her father's cabbages,—"yes, it is no lie of Julia Desmond's. A hundred recollections arise in my mind to bear witness to its truth. Maude's confession about the some one whom she had loved, but whose poverty was a hindrance to a marriage with her. Harcourt Lowther's letters from that beautiful heiress, whose father's wealth stood between him and happiness. I knew that they had known each other before he sailed for Van Diemen's Land; but I believed him implicitly when he told me casually one day that they had never been more than the most indifferent acquaintances. He had a careless, half-contemptuous way of talking of my wife that galled me to the quick, and that I have sometimes resented. Fool and dupe that I was! That affected cynicism, that pretended indifference, was only a part of his scheme. He loved her all the time; and while with one hand he pushed me away from her into the drunken orgies that only kill a little more

slowly than the secret doses of the assassin, with the other he held fast the chain that bound him to her; waiting till he should be able to say, 'You are free, and I claim the fulfilment of your broken promise. You are enriched by the death of the poor dupe who loved you, and poverty need separate us no longer.' Oh, God of heaven! what a fool I have been; and how clearly I can see my folly, now when it is too late! False wife, false friend! so deeply, fondly loved, so blindly trusted. I can remember my wife's face the day she spoke to me of Harcourt Lowther. Has she been in the base plot against me? No, I will not believe it. If I have been this man's blind dupe, his helpless tool, she may have been as blind, as helpless as myself. O God, give me strength to trust her still, for my heart must break if she is base and cruel."

A man's ideas are not apt to arrange themselves very consecutively at such a time; but it was something after this fashion that Francis Tredethlyn reflected upon his friend's treachery, while Rosa stood by watching him very anxiously,

with that fiery eagerness which had prompted her to speak her mind considerably cooled down by the aspect of her companion's distress.

"Miss Grunderson," said Francis presently, "whatever the world may have said against Harcourt Lowther, it is a false and lying world if it ever slandered the goodness and purity of my wife."

"I know that," answered Rosa, becoming energetic once more; "for of all the sweet darlings that ever were, she's the sweetest and the dearest. And how should *she* know that people made nasty disagreeable remarks about Mr. Lowther's always happening to go to the parties she went to, and calling here oftener than other people, and so on—"

"He went to parties!" cried Francis. "He told me that he hated parties; that he scarcely went any where."

"Ah, but he did, though; and it has been his flirting way—not the things he has said, you know, but his way of saying them, his *ompressmong*, you know, that has caused those ill-natured

remarks about Mrs. Tredethlyn. Nothing sets people talking like *ompressmong.*"

Francis did not answer. Little by little the mists cleared away from his mental vision; and he saw that Harcourt Lowther had been from first to last the subtlest schemer who ever plotted the ruin of an honest blockhead. It had needed only Miss Grunderson's feminine guesswork to let sudden light into the cavernous depths of the foulest pitfall that ever treachery dug under the ignorant footsteps of its victim. Francis remembered all the bitter ridicule, the sneering compassion, that Harcourt Lowther had heaped upon the respectable world, from which he held his dupe aloof, while he plunged him to the very lips in the dissipations of Bohemia. By this means he had effected as complete a separation between the husband and wife as if the same roof had ceased to shelter them.

"I have thought—when my tempter gave me time to think—that it was Maude's coldness alone which separated us; but I know now that it was the schemer's work from first to last. She did

not love me,—O Heaven, have pity upon my poor tortured heart!—she loved him perhaps: but I might have had some little chance of winning her love if I had remained at her feet—her slave, her worshipper; but he has held me away from her, and now she abhors me. She has no feeling but disgust and disdain for the wretch who has abandoned her to waste his days on a racecourse, his nights in the drunken orgies of a gaming-house."

Francis Tredethlyn sat with his face hidden in his hands, thinking of his folly, and hating himself for it. Why had he given himself up body and soul into the power of Harcourt Lowther? why had he been so poor a dupe in the toils of this man? It was not that he had entertained any special regard for the gentleman who had pretended to be his friend. In Van Diemen's Land he had often had good reason to despise the peevish grumbler, the selfish Sybarite; and yet for the last year he had taken the man's dictum upon every subject, even upon that one vital question on which the happiness of his

life depended. Why had he trusted so blindly; why had he submitted so slavishly to follow the guiding-strings that led him into places where he found no pleasure, amongst people who inspired him with disgust?

Little by little the answers to these questions shaped themselves in Francis Tredethlyn's mind; and he saw that his uncle Oliver's hoarded wealth had been at the root of all his misery. The wealth which had lifted him suddenly into a world that was strange to him; the wealth which had made him the mark for every schemer; the wealth which had won him the hand of the woman whose heart could never have been won by his true and honest love. Adrift in that strange world, the man who had kept his name unsullied, his soul untainted, his head erect before the faces of his fellow-men, while his pockets were empty, and his very existence dependent upon the day's work that earned him a day's food, found himself all at once the most helpless creature that had ever floated at the mercy of the winds and waves upon a trackless ocean; and he had been very glad to grasp the

first rope that was thrown out to him in all friendly seeming to guide him safely to the shore. His ignorance had flung him, unarmed and powerless, into Harcourt Lowther's arms; and the man to whom he had felt himself superior while blacking his boots and obeying his orders out in Van Diemen's Land became all at once, indeed, the master, free to work his own will with that most helpless of all creatures, an uneducated millionaire.

"If I had a son," thought Francis Tredethlyn, —and a faint thrill was stirred in his breast by the mere hypothesis,—"I should send him to school before I turned him out into the world. Yet I, who am as ignorant as a baby of the world in which I live, have plunged recklessly into its vortex, expecting to emerge unhurt. My own folly is the cause of my destruction. And yet I might have met with an honest friend; I might have had a loving wife."

"A loving wife!" Ah, how the poor faithful heart ached as Francis thought this! A man's fireside is the same peaceful sanctuary, whether the hearth is gorgeous with encaustic tiles and

an Axminster rug, or poorly covered with a scrap of faded Kidderminster, in some humble chamber where the firelight glimmers on the delf platters that adorn a cottage-dresser.

"If Maude had loved me," Francis argued, brooding moodily upon his wrongs, "my money need have brought me no misery; my ignorance would have beguiled me into no danger. Her voice would have regulated my life; her counsel would have prompted every action. Her smallest wish would have been my law. And it would have been very hard if the companionship of a lady had not in time transformed me into a gentleman. But *what* are the people with whom I have herded since my marriage—the acquaintances whom Harcourt Lowther has chosen for me? What! pshaw! why do I stop to think of all this? She never loved me. I should have tried to win her love if *he* had left me to do so. I might have failed even then as miserably as I have failed now."

He groaned aloud as he thought this, and startled Miss Grunderson, who was sitting at a respectful distance from him folding and unfolding

her parasol, and wondering why she had got into this *galère*, and how she was to get out of it; and registering a mental vow that she would never again be tempted by her recollection of her duty to her neighbour to depart from the manners and customs of polite society. But to her relief Francis looked up presently, and addressed her.

"I thank you heartily for having spoken so frankly to me," he said; "it is only right that I should be acquainted with the common talk about the man whose hand I have clasped in friendship almost every day for the last twelve months. But I hope you will believe that, whatever Mr. Lowther may or may not be, my wife is good and pure, and worthy of the warmest affection you can feel for her. Your warmth of feeling has touched me deeply, Miss Grunderson. I have been living in so false an atmosphere lately, that I must be dull indeed if I were not affected by your friendly candour. If—if any thing should happen to separate Maude and me, I should be very glad to think she had such a friend as you. And—if ever you saw her trusting, as I have trusted, in the truth and

honour of Harcourt Lowther, you would stand between her and that dangerous adviser, that false friend—would you not, Miss Grunderson?"

"I would," answered Rosa valiantly; "I should speak my mind to her and to Mr. Lowther into the bargain, as candidly as I have spoken it to you to-night."

"I believe you would," said Francis. "And now, my dear, God bless you, and good-night."

He held out both his hands and clasped Rosa's pudgy little paws in a brief grasp, and then strode past her on his way towards the door.

"You're not going out to-night, are you, Mr. Tredethlyn?" she asked anxiously, "it is so *very* late."

Poor little Rosa was rather alarmed by that resolute stride towards the door, which might only be the first step in some ghastly vengeance to be taken upon Harcourt Lowther by the stalwart Cornishman.

"I shouldn't like to have his blood upon my head, though I *do* hate and detest him," thought Miss Grunderson; "for in these days of spirit-

rapping there's no knowing how he might spite himself upon me. I might have him tilting and tiptoeing every table I ever sat down to."

"I'm only going to my room to write a letter," answered Mr. Tredethlyn; "shall I order my wife's carriage for you?"

"No, thank you; as our house is so near, I think I'll ask one of your servants to see me home," replied Rosa, who had no idea of leaving the ground just yet. "I'll run up to Mrs. Tredethlyn's room and say good-bye. Shall I take her any message from you?"

"None, thank you; good-night."

"Good-night."

Rosa left him still standing in the drawing-room. The spacious and grandiose apartment, in all of whose costly adornment—from the pictures on the walls to the Louis-Seize snuff-boxes and lapis-lazuli *bonbonnières*, and all the expensive frivolities so lavishly scattered on the tables—there was no single object which had been chosen with any reference to his taste, with any thought of his comfort or pleasure. No exquisite joys of "pick-

ing-up;" no delicious bargaining with dirty brokers in the purlieus of Holborn; no evening excursions, treasure-hunting, among dingy byways, where remnants of choice old china lurk sometimes, unrecognised and unvalued, amongst the rubbish in a dimly-lighted shop-window; none of the pleasant struggles, the proud triumphs, which attend the collection of Poverty's art and *virtu*, had attended the decoration of this splendid chamber. The Cornishman had given *carte blanche* to his friend, and had written cheques—whose figures he had not remembered five minutes after writing them—in favour of a celebrated dealer in Bond Street, and an upholsterer in Oxford Street; and that was all. He smiled bitterly now as he paused to look round the room before he left it—perhaps for ever.

"And this has been my home," he thought. "Home! Better to sit by my uncle Oliver's miserly fire, in the dreary house on the Cornish moors, than to loll in one of those yellow-satin chairs, playing at ball with a gold snuffbox, and watching the traitor whom I have trusted talking to my wife."

CHAPTER VI.

THE LADY AT PETERSHAM.

THE letter which Francis Tredethlyn wrote in his study was a long one; a very painful one to write, as it seemed, from the face of the writer, and the weary sigh which every now and then escaped from his lips, as his hurrying pen paused for a moment. It was close upon ten o'clock when he began the letter. The clock chimed the half-hour after eleven while he was sealing it. He addressed the envelope, and then threw himself back in his chair to think. He had so much to think of. Maude's extraordinary conduct, Rosa Grunderson's revelation, had overthrown the whole fabric of his life; and he found himself surrounded by ruins whose utter chaos he could not contemplate without bewilderment.

For the last few weeks his thoughts had been

almost exclusively devoted to his cousin Susan, and her wrongs. Found at last, after so many failures and disappointments, so much delay, the lonely girl had been welcomed as tenderly as any wanderer who ever returned to the lost friends of his youth. But Susan Lesley had a sad story to tell her cousin. The missing link in the chain that Francis Tredethlyn had put together piece by piece was the letter which had been written from St. Petersburg by the man whom Susan had loved and trusted—the man whose diary had revealed to Francis the utter worthlessness of his character.

Robert Lesley's letter was only a worthy companion to Robert Lesley's diary. In it he coldly and deliberately told the girl who loved him, that she was not his wife; that the Marylebone marriage was no marriage; the registrar no recognised official, but a scoundrel hired for a twenty-pound note to play the part of that functionary; that the registrar's office had been no office, but a lodging-house parlour hired for the occasion, and half-a-dozen doors from the real office. This

statement was, of course, accompanied by the usual heartless sophistries which run so glibly from the pen, or fall so smoothly from the lips, of an utterly heartless man. The self-confessed betrayer pleaded the madness of an all-absorbing love; the stern necessities of well-bred poverty; the pressure of family circumstances; the fear of a father's rage; and then, in conclusion, the writer stated the pitiful stipend which he was prepared to offer to the woman he had abandoned, and the child he had disowned.

Susan showed her cousin this letter, and told him how, after receiving it, her mind had almost given way under the burden of her great agony. Then it was that she had gone to Mrs. Burfield, and had written to her father a long letter, telling him something of her story, but not all; appealing piteously to the only friend to whom she could appeal; for faithful Frank was far away in some unknown country. She told her cousin how she had waited, at first with a faint sickly hope, then with a blank despair, for some answer from the father to whom she had appealed. But none

came; and when her little stock of money had sunk to its lowest ebb, she left the dull quiet of Coltonslough to begin a weary, lonely struggle for bread, which had endured, without one ray of sunlight to illumine its blank misery, until the summer Sunday afternoon on which Francis Tredethlyn found her sitting in the nurse's cottage with her boy in her arms.

It was so sad a story, and so sadly common, that there is little need to dwell upon the unvarnished record of a woman's battle with poverty in the heart of a great city.

"Perhaps I ought to think myself very happy, Francis," Susan said when she had told her story; "for I was always able to pay the nurse somehow for her care of my darling; and the deadly fear of not being able to do *that* was the worst trouble I knew in all that dreary time. I have been face to face with starvation, Frank, very often within the last two years, but it is not so terrible, when one is used to it. The help always came at last, and some friendly hand, so unexpected that it might have dropped down from

heaven, has often come between me and despair. I have sometimes thought that bitter struggle for my daily bread was only a blessing in disguise, for it kept me from brooding upon my great sorrow; it sometimes shut from me the thought of Robert's cruelty and my own disgrace."

"Disgrace!" cried the Cornishman; "no, Susan, there is no shadow of disgrace upon you except the disgrace of being united to a scoundrel and a liar. The marriage before the registrar was a *bonâ-fide* marriage, as binding as if it had been performed by the Archbishop of Canterbury."

And then Francis told Susan of his visit to the registrar's office. This was the balm which he was able to pour into the deepest wound that ever tortured a woman's heart. But the identity of the husband who had lied in denouncing himself a liar was entirely unknown to Susan. In all the familiar intercourse of the brief period in which the trusting girl had been a petted and happy wife, Robert Lesley had not let fall one careless word relating in the remotest way to his position in life, his family, or his prospects. When

first consulted by Francis upon the contents of the diary, Messrs. Kursdale and Scardon had instituted an inquiry as to whether a Mr. Robert Lesley had been inscribed on the books of St. Boniface any time between 1845 and 1852; and the answer had been in the negative. No person of the name had been a member of that college within the last ten years. Francis could only conclude, therefore, that Mrs. Burfield had been right in her supposition that the man calling himself Robert Lesley had shielded his identity under a false name.

"But your husband was visited by his brother, was he not, Susan?" said Mr. Tredethlyn, when this subject was discussed between the cousins.

"Yes; but I knew no more of Robert's brother than of Robert himself. He did not come to us often. I heard that he was a lawyer,—a barrister, I think,—and that he lived in the Temple. I heard even that by accident, and Robert seemed almost vexed that I should know so much."

All these trifling circumstances seemed to point

inevitably to one conclusion: Robert Lesley had intended from the first to abandon his wife, whenever his own interests rendered it advisable that he should throw off the tie that bound him to her. Love and selfishness go very badly hand-in-hand together; and love had soon left selfishness sole master of the field.

"But this man shall be made to acknowledge his wife,—to give a name to his child," cried Francis, "if he can be found."

If he could be found: that was the grand question. But Mr. Tredethlyn was quite at a loss with regard to the means by which his cousin's husband was to be found. In this case even the grand medium by which the lost are restored to the arms of their friends—the second column of the *Times*—could be of no avail; for what is the use of advertising for a man who does not want to reveal himself?

"If my husband is alive, Providence may throw him across my path some day," Susan said resignedly. "He could not be more dead to me than he is now if he were buried in the deepest

grave that ever held the ashes of the lost; but if he gave my boy the name that is his right, I think I could forgive him all the wrong he has done me."

It was quite in vain that Francis Tredothlyn sought to carry his cousin and her son home to his own house. The sorrowful young mother shrank with absolute terror from the idea of encountering strangers, of finding herself in a splendid house amongst happy people.

"I am used to my poverty, Francis," she said; —"let me be poor still. Nobody is inquisitive about me, because I am beneath people's curiosity. No one questions me about the husband who has deserted me, or extorts my story from me only to doubt it when it is told. My father would not believe me; can I expect strangers to be more trusting than he was? No, Francis; leave me alone in my obscurity. I have a lodging near here, and I can see my darling every day. I will freely accept from you a little income which will enable me to live as I have lived, without working as hard as I have worked; but I will accept no

more. I am delighted to think that my father left his fortune to you, Frank; and I thank and bless you for having taken so much trouble to find me out."

Francis Tredethlyn found it hard work to win Susan away from this determination, so quietly expressed. But he did at last persuade her to agree to his own plans for her life, on condition that he should tell Maude nothing, nor ask Susan to meet her until the missing husband was found, and compelled to acknowledge his wife and son. Francis consented to promise this; but he cherished a hope that Susan would relent by and bye, when she heard more of Maude's tender and amiable nature, and that he would be able to win his wife's friendship for the simple country-girl who had played with him amongst the daisies in Landresdale churchyard.

"You must accept the home I shall prepare for you, Susy," said Francis, "or I will have a deed of gift drawn up to-morrow, transferring half my fortune to you. I am ready to divide your father's wealth with you as soon as ever I

understand your legal position. In the mean time let me have the sweetest pleasure my money has ever given me yet—the pleasure of making a happy home for you and my little kinsman. If you knew how I have wasted that hoarded money, Susy, on racecourses, and all kinds of worthless places," added Mr. Tredethlyn, with a remorseful recollection of one particular brand of Moselle, for which he had been wont to pay fourteen shillings a bottle in the purlieus of the Haymarket.

Susan consented to let her cousin do what he liked with regard to the place in which she was to live henceforward. What mother could refuse a bright home for the child she loves? A few words from Francis conjured up the vision of a garden, where the boy could play under the shadow of lilacs and laburnums; where the summer breeze would waft the petals of overblown roses around that golden head. From the happy moment in which he urged the child's welfare as an argument against the mother, Francis Tredethlyn's triumph was secured. Susan pondered. She thought of the sweet country air, the bright

rooms, with the fresh breath of morning blowing in at the open windows, the garden, the cow, the chickens, and all the joys of that sweet rustic paradise which town-bred children hear of from their mother's lips, and see only in their dreams. Susan hesitated. Francis had made friends with the boy by this time, and had enlisted the child on his side of the argument. When the woman's sorrowful pride began to hold out weakly, when the mother's heart showed symptoms of relenting, the child's little chubby arms crept round her neck, and the child's tiny voice pleaded in her ear:

"Peese, mammy, do live in the pooty house, and let Wobert have pooty flowers."

It was the triumph of infantine oratory. Susan turned to her kinsman, half laughing, half crying, and gave him her hand.

"You must do as you like, cousin Frank," she said. "Whatever is best for Robert must be best for me."

Thus it was that Francis Tredethlyn had withdrawn himself in a great measure from the society

of Mr. Lowther, while he scoured the prettiest suburbs in search of a home for his cousin, and superintended the necessary improvements and decoration, the selection of the simple furniture, the arrangement of a garden, in which Robert Lesley's son might play happily, his life undarkened by the baseness of an unknown father. There had been unspeakable pleasure for the Cornishman in the doing of this work. It was so long since he had been of use to any one; it was so long since his supremest benevolence to his fellow-men had taken any higher form than the payment of a dinner-bill, and a handsome bonus to the waiter. He seemed to breathe a new atmosphere, a fresher, purer air, when he shook himself clear of Harcourt Lowther's society, and spent a summer's day pottering amongst carpenters and house-painters in the Petersham cottage. The odour of turpentine and lead did not give him a headache; it was almost invigorating after the stifling fumes of musk and mock-turtle, patchouli and devilled whitebait, that had pervaded the hotel dining-rooms in which he had so often acted as host. Energetic

though Mr. Tredethlyn was in the carrying out of his arrangements, Susan had been established little more than a week at the cottage, and the paint on the venetian shutters was still rather sticky, when Harcourt Lowther found the upholsterer's bill, which gave him the clue to his pupil's mysterious conduct. To hasten down to Petersham, find the cottage, refresh himself with dry sherry and soda-water at the nearest tavern, and to make himself agreeably familiar with the landlord of the tavern, was all incomparably easy to Mr. Lowther. From the landlord he heard all about Brook Cottage. How it had been to let for nearly a twelvemonth; how it had been taken all in a hurry at the end of May by a dashing-looking gentleman from town, who had been reported scouring the neighbourhood in hansom cabs, inquiring for houses to let, for three days at a stretch; how painters and glaziers, carpenters and gardeners, had set to work in hot haste to renew and revivify every thing in-doors and out; how wagon-loads of the finest gravel from Wimbledon, and cart-loads of the softest turf from Ham, had been

laid down in the garden; how furniture, that was every bit of it new, had been brought down from London; how the tall, dashing, energetic gentleman in the hansom cab had been perpetually on the ground with his officious finger for ever in the pie; and how larger cans of half-and-half had been consumed by the workmen at the cost of the dashing gentleman than the landlord of the Prince's Feathers remembered to have chalked-up against any one customer since he had traded as a licensed victualler.

All this Mr. Lowther was told; and beyond this, he heard how a lady, very pretty and quite young, but a little pale and worn-looking, had arrived at last to take possession of "the prettiest little box that was ever put together, without regard to expense;" how she was attended by an elderly female in black, who had evidently seen better days, and who acted as nurse to a little boy; how two respectable young women had been hired in the neighbourhood, to act as cook and housemaid; and how, coming regularly to the Feathers in quest of the kitchen-beer, they had

already reported their mistress as the sweetest and pleasantest of ladies, and first-cousin to the dashing gentleman in the hansom cab. The landlord tried to look as if he had no uncharitable thoughts about this cousinship; but Harcourt Lowther saw that Francis Tredethlyn and the lady had been subjects of grave scandal in that quiet country-place. He heard that the dashing gentleman had been at Petersham almost every day for the last week; and that he and the lady passed the greater part of their time in the garden, where they might be seen at any time from the high road,—the gentleman smoking and playing with the little boy, and the lady working, at a rustic table, under a mulberry-tree. A pot-boy, coming in from his rounds as Harcourt lounged at the bar, confirmed the landlord's statement when appealed to. He had passed Brook Cottage not five minutes before, and had seen the lady and gentleman talking to a gardener, who was doing something to a rose-tree.

"She's a rare one for flowers, the lady is," the potman said in conclusion.

A rare one for flowers: Harcourt Lowther mused gravely upon this remark.

The fair denizens of Bohemia, to whom he had introduced Francis, were not generally devoted to floriculture in cottage-gardens, though they were greedy of gigantic bouquets, to rest on the velvet-cushions of their opera-boxes, or the front seats of their carriages, when they drove to race meetings. Who was this pale, worn-looking young woman, who called Francis cousin? Was she really his cousin, that Cornish girl of whom the soldier had told his master in Van Diemen's Land, and whose miserably-executed likeness had reminded Harcourt of another face, whose owner had played some part in the experience of his life? Was this inhabitant of the newly-furnished cottage really the Cornish cousin? Mr. Lowther could scarcely imagine that it was so; for, in that case, why should Francis have kept her existence a secret from his *fidus Achates* in the person of Harcourt himself?

"Secrecy is only another name for guilt," thought Mr. Lowther. "Our friend has gone to

the bad in real earnest this time, and I can make a *coup*. I was getting very tired of the slow game."

Armed with this information, the schemer went back to town, to take his place in Maude's opera-box, and to lead up to that idea of a morning at the Cedars, which seemed to originate in Mrs. Tredethlyn's own brain. Chance, which had been against him so long, had gone with him unfailingly in this business. The lucky moment had come; he had got his lead at last, and had only to play his winning cards. Chance had been constant to the schemer even in that interview between Francis and Rosa; for it had happened that, in all Miss Grunderson's candid outpourings, she had not dropped a word about Mrs. Tredethlyn's stroll in the Petersham meadows; though, even if she had done so, the Cornishman might have been very slow to perceive that an accidental glimpse of himself and gentle Susy, in friendly companionship, could have been the primary cause of that stormy greeting which he had received at the hands of his wife. Francis accepted his wife's passionate outburst as only

the climax of the disgust and weariness with which he had inspired her.

"She reproaches me for the life I have been leading lately," he said bitterly; "but she does not understand her own feelings. It is not my life, but me she hates. It is myself that inspires the loathing and contempt which she talked of, and not my late hours or my gambling and horse-racing."

After sitting for some time plunged in a gloomy reverie, in the dreary library, where the backs of the books he never opened seemed to frown upon him in their sombre Russia leather brownness, Francis stirred as the little black-marble clock on the mantelpiece chimed the quarter after twelve, and felt in his waistcoat-pocket for a note which he had found waiting for him on his table the previous night. It was a tiny twisted *poulet* from Harcourt Lowther.

"DEAR FRANK,—A line to remind you of to-morrow night. You will be expected any time after nine. Yours always,

"H. L."

This reminder referred to a bachelor's supper which Mr. Lowther had arranged at his lodgings; a party at which there was to be what the host called a quiet rubber. A rubber played with that deadly quiet which attends the science of whist when heavy amounts tremble in the balance, and a sum that a poor man would call a fortune may depend on the player's judicious choice between a five and a seven. Such a rubber as that which the well-known Sir Robert was once concluding, when, just as he pondered over his two last cards, a thoughtless looker-on happened to break the solemn silence by one luckless word, and, lo, the chain of scientific reasoning dropped to pieces, —the popular statesman played the wrong card, and lost a thousand pounds. It was not often that Harcourt Lowther entertained his friends; but when Francis lapsed into a temporary stagnation, the master was apt to keep his pupil going on the road to ruin by such an entertainment as this. The quiet rubber at Mr. Lowther's lodgings generally led to other rubbers elsewhere, or cursory appointments for Liverpool

or Newmarket, or Chester or Northampton, or a dinner at Richmond, gaily cut for at blind hookey while the men were rising from the whist-table. It was a quarter-past twelve now. It would be nearly one o'clock before the fastest hansom could carry Mr. Tredethlyn to the Strand. Francis looked from the clock on the chimney-piece to the scrap of paper in his hand; hesitated for a few moments, with a black frown upon his face, and then started hastily from his lounging attitude, and looked about him for his hat.

"There couldn't be a better opportunity," he muttered, "for saying what I want to say to him."

CHAPTER VII.

A HASTY RECKONING.

HARCOURT LOWTHER had never played so bad a rubber as that with which he beguiled the evening while waiting Francis Tredethlyn's appearance at the little bachelor-party assembled in his rooms. There was the usual blending of the hawk and pigeon tribe at Mr. Lowther's reunion: the birds of prey distinguishable by the purple blackness of their dyed moustaches and the crow's-feet round their faded eyes; the innocent fledglings fresh-coloured and tawny, with a profound belief in their own wisdom and a supreme contempt for every thing outside the narrow circle in which they condescended to exist.

Mr. Lowther suffered his partner to knock under ignominiously to antagonistic sevens and nines, while the big cards lurked idle in his own hand, to fall at the close into the ravenous jaws

of the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth trumps; nor was he to be roused into decent play by the unqualified remonstrances of his victim. He was thinking of Maude. It was not the face of the queen of spades which he saw as he sat hopelessly staring at the card in a vain endeavour to concentrate his attention; it was Maude's speaking, passionate countenance which looked at him, all aglow with angry feeling. He saw her in all her beauty as he had seen her that afternoon,—the tremulous lips, the flashing blue eyes,—for there are blue eyes which in anger have more fire than the starriest orbs that ever veiled their lightnings under the cloudy lace of an Andalusian marchesa. His love for her—which was one of the most selfish passions of a selfish nature—had grown and strengthened day by day since the hour of his return, and had kindled into an all-absorbing flame now that he seemed so near his triumph.

Was he near his triumph? That question occurred to him several times as he sat opposite his friend Captain Harrison of the Spanish Legion, playing the unluckiest rubber that the Captain had

been engaged in for weeks,—"And the beggar had such first-rate cards too," as the Captain said afterwards, politely criticising his friend's play; "if he hadn't kep' his trumps so jolly dark we could have carried every thing before us."

Was he near his triumph? He had been playing for two stakes—the woman he loved and the fortune he envied. He knew Maude Tredethlyn well enough to know that so long as her husband lived, she was as far beyond his reach as the stars which shone down upon him as he walked home from Stuccoville, and of whose light he thought so little. Maude, as the daughter of an insolvent trader, was a lovely being whom he had felt no reluctance to resign; for he had looked forward with a horrible foresight to the day when the girl he loved should be again within his reach; no longer as a penniless spinster, but a wealthy widow. *This* had been the goal which Harcourt had seen at the end of that weary road along which he conducted the young man who trusted him. No physician ever watched a patient more intently than Mr. Lowther watched the slow undermining of the Cornish-

man's glorious constitution under the influence of late hours and hard drinking. The bloodshot eyes, the unsteady hand, the failing appetite, the uncertain spirits, the feverish unrest, were all diagnostics that marked the progress of the schemer's work. Mr. Lowther had seen so many young men drop down in the poisoned atmosphere to which he introduced Maude's husband. He hoped that the end which had come to so many would come to this ignorant, blundering rustic, into whose lap blind Plutus had cast the wealth that should have fallen to better men. The end must come; for the stupid Crœsus tumbled so helplessly into the snare, and abandoned himself so completely to his captor's mercy. It was only a question of patience. The end would come in due time: and then there was the woman he loved, and the richest widow in London, to reward the plotter's patience, to crown his efforts with happiness and success. To-day's business, Harcourt Lowther argued, as he played that unfortunate rubber, could not be otherwise than a lucky stroke, likely to hurry matters to a crisis. Francis had slipped out of

his hands so often of late, had kept better hours and drunk less. But a serious quarrel with Maude would inevitably fling Mr. Tredethlyn back upon the spurious Lethe of the brandy-bottle, and would hasten the schemer's work to its fatal close. "I think I have shut the door of his home upon him," thought Harcourt; "it will be strange if he is not glad to drop completely into the groove in which I want to see him."

This, in plain English, is the plan which Harcourt Lowther had made for himself; though he would scarcely have put his scheme into such very plain words, even in his own thoughts. Iago, in a play or a novel, is obliged to give utterance to his schemes with tolerable clearness; but the real Iago is reticent, even in commune with himself, and huddles his blackest thoughts into some dark corner of his mind, where they lie conveniently hidden from the eye of conscience.

Before twelve o'clock Mr. Lowther had abandoned his place at the whist-table to his brother; and after lounging behind the chair of a young man who was playing *écarté*, and making a ran-

dom bet now and then, the host proposed supper, —a proposition which was received very warmly by the men who were losing money, and very coolly by the winners. Harcourt Lowther's supper was almost as unceremonious an affair as that memorable entertainment in Lant Street, Borough, at which Mr. Robert Sawyer played the part of host. A young man, hired for the occasion from a neighbouring tavern, laid the cloth very rapidly, while the guests lounged against the corners of the mantelpieces, and grouped themselves in little knots, to discuss coming events in the racing world, or to criticise current pictures and current theatricals, with an occasional spice of current scandal.

The supper was very simple. There were unlimited supplies of those delicate little oysters which seem created with a special view to bachelors' supper-parties, and the refreshment of exhausted playgoers; and whose native beds the ignorant foreigner might not unnaturally imagine to lie somewhere at the back of the Strand. And to wash these down, Mr. Lowther had provided Chablis, white Her-

mitage, and Rüdesheimer. There were spatchcocks and devilled kidneys, fried potatoes, monster lobsters, marvellous cheeses from the remotest cantons of Switzerland, and the most delicate varieties of green-stuff from a French fruiterer's in the purlieus of Leicester Square. There was no pretence of an elaborate entertainment; but there was an open case of sparkling Moselle by the side of Mr. Lowther's chair, into which he dipped about once in five minutes; and the young man from the tavern had been initiated into the mysteries of a claret-cup, which he compounded at a rickety little sideboard in the inner room.

So far as the guests went, the supper was a success. There was just the amount of confusion which gives a picnic flavour to a meal, and which seems an infallible stimulant of animal spirits. Mr. Lowther's visitors enjoyed themselves immensely, and the party was becoming boisterous in its gaiety, when the door was opened and Francis Tredethlyn walked in.

Harcourt Lowther pushed away the Moselle case, which was now only filled with tumbled

straw and empty bottles, and called for a chair, which was edged into the corner at the host's right-hand.

"You'll have some supper, Tredethlyn?" he said, while Francis was shaking hands with some of the men. They were all known to him, and all knew his story, and had a pretty clear idea that Harcourt was what they called "cleaning him out," in the most approved style by which the process can be performed. "These things are all cold, I'm afraid. Jones, run across and get some fresh oysters, and you can order another spatch-cock—to be ready in a quarter of an hour at the latest. Sit down, dear boy. What the deuce have you been doing with yourself all night! Give him elbow-room, Harding, that's a good fellow, and don't knock your ashes on to this corner of the table-cloth just yet. Now, then, Philcote, the 'Last rose of summer' as soon as you like; but you may as well make up your mind what key you'll sing it in *before* you begin."

Francis called back the man as he was hurrying from the room.

"Stop!" he cried; "you needn't order anything more—for me. I shan't eat supper to-night."

Something in his tone arrested every other voice; and there was a silence as sudden and as complete as if some magician had waved his wand and changed Harcourt Lowther's guests into stone. Something in his look attracted every eye, and held it fixed in a wondering stare upon his face. Mr. Philcote, who fancied himself an amateur Sims Reeves, was disturbed in his calculation of that vocal bullfinch to be cleared between the third and fourth notes of the "Last rose of summer," and abandoned all thoughts of singing his favourite ballad.

The Cornishman's colourless face and disordered hair and dress might have suggested the idea that he had been drinking; but there was an inscrutable something in that white face which was not compatible with drunkenness. Harcourt Lowther looked at him nervously. The marital quarrel had come off, evidently, and Francis took matters very seriously.

"Come, Mr. Troublefeast," cried the host, "we're not going to stand this sort of thing, you know. We'll have no statue of the Commander stalking in upon us in the midst of our fun—without Mozart. What the deuce is the matter with you, dear boy? Roderick, pass that tankard this way, will you? You fellows down there contrive to keep every thing to yourself. Let the rosy vintage circulate. There's another half-dozen of the claret in the next room, and no end of lemons. So the moment for the selfishness of the savage to overpower the civilisation of the gentleman has not arrived. Come, Frank, take down the shutters, and light up; you've made us all as quiet as the frozen crew described by that pertinacious old bore, the Ancient Mariner. Take a long dip into that tankard, old fellow, and come up bright again."

Mr. Lowther struck his small white hand lightly upon his friend's shoulder as he concluded. Francis had dropped into the place offered to him, and sat there, looking like nothing *but* the Commander, in his stony rigidity of face and figure.

As Harcourt Lowther's hand alighted on his shoulder, he startled every one by throwing it deliberately away from him.

"I have had enough of your friendship, thank you," he said; "henceforward, if we are to be any thing at all to each other, I had rather we should be foes—I may have better luck perhaps that way."

"Tredethlyn! are you drunk? or mad?"

"Neither; but I *have* been both; for I have trusted you. You needn't ask me what I mean," said Francis, interrupting Harcourt Lowther's exclamation by a rapid gesture of his uplifted hand; "I am going to tell you, and very plainly. Gentlemen, you were going to listen to a song just now: have you any objection to hearing a story instead? There will be time for your ballad afterwards, you know, Philcote. My story is not a long one."

Harcourt Lowther had turned very pale. His light blue eyes glittered, and the slim white fingers of his right hand closed involuntarily on the knife that had been lying near them. He

looked as a man might look, who, marching proudly upon the road to victory, saw the earth yawn asunder beneath his feet, and knew all at once that his next step must hurl him to a dreadful death. He was very quiet; but the quivering of his thin nostrils, the quickening of his breath, and his faded colour, betrayed a degree of agitation which set his guests wondering, and infused a dash of excitement into the wind-up of the little banquet. The highest development of Christianity cannot quite extinguish the natural savage. Cromwell's Ironsides did murderous work with the gospel in their wallets and pious exclamations upon their lips; and it seems the attribute of human nature to delight in a row. The guests at Harcourt Lowther's supper-table pricked up their ears with one accord, and it was with considerable difficulty that they managed to keep up a faint attempt at that kind of conversation which had engaged them, in twos and threes, before Francis Tredethlyn's entrance. When they spoke to one another now, it was only in undertones, and their disjointed sentences revealed the fact that they

were listening to the speaker at the end of the table. But when Francis spoke of telling a story, the company dropped all pretence of indifference to him; and listened with a polite appearance of perfect unconsciousness as to any unfriendly intention on the part of the late visitor.

"Sing your song, Philcote," said Harcourt Lowther, resolutely; "we want no stories—we've no time for twaddle of that sort. Let's have a good song or two, and then we'll go into the next room for a rubber."

Mr. Philcote, whose nerves were fluttered by the ominous gloom that had so suddenly fallen upon the assembly, gave a despairing cough, and made a husky plunge at the A flat on which he should have begun the sweetest song-writer's sweetest song; but before he had articulated his initiatory "'Tis," a big man, with a black moustache, who owed Harcourt Lowther a grudge, and had been consuming the best bits of the lobsters, and the lion's share of the Moselle, under a mental protest, interrupted the timid singer:

"Let's have the story first, and the 'Last rose'

afterwards," he said. "Fire away, Tredethlyn; your audience have supped luxuriously, and are in good humour."

"I daresay it's a common story enough in your set, Boystock," answered Francis; "but it isn't a long one. It is the story of a man who was lifted one day from poverty to wealth, and found himself all at once alone in a world as strange to him as if he had been transported out of this planet into another inhabited by a different species."

"Egad," muttered Mr. Boystock, "I wish somebody would transport me!"

"Ah, it isn't likely, old fellow, in *that* way," murmured his neighbour.

"For some time the country-bred cub—he was country-bred, and what you would call a cub—got on well enough. He floundered into a few mistakes, and he floundered out of them, after his own ignorant fashion. I think there is a providence for such men, as there is for drunkards, and so long as they stagger along *alone*, they come to very little grief. He did a great many silly things

with his money, I daresay; but I think he *once* did a generous thing—though, God knows, in doing it, he only followed the blind impulse of his undisciplined heart as ignorantly as if he had been some blundering Newfoundland dog that pulls the mistress he loves out of the water where he sees her drowning. His wealth prospered with him, though he had cared little enough for it when it fell into his hands. By means of it he was able to save the woman he loved from a great trouble; and in her boundless gratitude for the service which he valued so lightly, she abandoned herself to the purest impulse that ever stirred a noble breast, and offered him her hand. If he had been generous or wise, he would have refused the hand which could not give him a heart. He was only —in love. Selfishly, stupidly, he seized the proffered sacrifice; too besotted in his blind passion to perceive that it was a sacrifice."

Mr. Lowther's guests stared blankly at one another. They had not dropped their own talk to hear such stuff as this. Harcourt sat very still, with his hand always upon the knife. At the other

end of the table lounged Roderick, the very picture of well-bred indifference. He felt that his brother had dropped in for it; but he had no idea of interrupting the action of the little drama by any fraternal championship.

"Let them fight it out their own way," he thought; "I like to see the white man suffer."

"The country-bred cub was still fresh to the intoxication of his fancied happiness, when a man who had been familiar with him in his poverty came from the distant part of the world where they had met and known each other, and offered to be his friend. The cub's ignorance of life was so complete that he did not know it was possible for a man who bore her Majesty's commission, and called himself a gentleman, to be a liar and a villain. He trusted his old acquaintance implicitly, and accepted him as a friend—believing, still in his boorish ignorance, that there was such a thing as friendship, or, at the worst, an honourable good fellowship between honest men. His friend did not tell him that he had been the engaged lover of the woman the boor was going to marry; and

when the young couple began their new life, he planted himself in their house; and his first act was to shut the husband from the home whose dingiest room was a paradise, so long as it was sanctified by the presence of an idolised wife. Will any one at this table guess the plot which the boor's friend hatched against him in the hour when their hands first met in friendship? I think not. The gentleman—polished, well-born, highly educated—allowed the country cub to marry the woman he loved; reserving to himself the hope of marrying her, enriched by the cub's money, when the cub was dead. This once arranged, there was only one thing more to be settled; and that was the cub's life. Unluckily he was a brawny six-foot fellow, with the constitution of a prize-fighter. But then prize-fighters are not always long-lived: their habits are so apt to be against them. Well, gentlemen, there have been men who have undermined a victim's strength with small doses of antimony, while they smiled in his face, and called him brother. We manage these things better nowadays. The gentleman

resolved that the boor should drink himself to death."

"Is this the plot of a French novel?" asked Roderick superciliously, after a brief silence, in which Francis Tredethlyn had paused to take breath; "if it is, you had better tell us the title of the book, and let us read it in the original. There may be some chance of our thinking it interesting *then*."

"There are shameful things done out of novels as well as in them, Mr. Lowther," answered Francis. "What I am telling you is the truth. The gentleman took the wealthy boor under his protection, and from that hour the cub's mind and the cub's body began to wither under the influence of a vice which of himself he held in abhorrence, but which in the dull indifference of a man who has no hope to elevate him, no aim to strive for, he was weak enough to accept as the cure for all his troubles. What did it matter how many glasses of brandy he drank, or how often he staggered across his dreary threshold in the early morning, stupefied by foul gaslit atmospheres and

bad wines? His friend took care to remind him that there was no one to be sorry for his misdeeds, or to rejoice in his repentance if he repented. He could not sink so low that his wife would be affected by his degradation; he could not rise so high that she would be proud of his elevation. His friend dinned the bitter truth into the wretch's ear. The beautiful young wife despised him; the wealth that other men envied was useless to him, except in its power to buy the oblivion of the brandy-bottle. From the hour in which his well-born friend took him under his protection, the boor never did a generous action, or heard a noble sentiment: and he very rarely went home sober. He was drinking himself to death as fast as a strong man can, when Providence took compassion on him, and gave him a duty to fulfil. A helpless girl, his kinswoman, was thrown across his path, and all at once he found himself of use in the world. From that moment his friend's scheme was overthrown. Good-bye to the brandy-bottle and the bad wines! The boor had a friendless woman dependent on his protection, and he

had something to live for. He determined to sink the past; bid farewell to the wife whose affection he was unable to win; turn his back upon the circle he had lived in and the people who had known him; and finish his days honestly among honest men."

"'So he died, and she very imprudently married the barber,'" exclaimed Mr. Boystock. "It's a very good story, I daresay; but apropos to what?" demanded the gentleman, looking at Harcourt Lowther with a malicious twinkle in his little black eyes. "I don't see the connection with the proverbial *bottes*. What does it all mean?"

"It means, gentlemen, that I am the boor who has been the dupe of a villain, and will be so no longer; and the name of the villain is Harcourt Lowther."

There was a moment's silence, followed by a sudden smashing of glass. A pair of small sinewy white hands fastened cat-like upon Francis Tredethlyn's throat, and he and Harcourt Lowther were grappling each other in a fierce struggle. It

was very long since the gentleman had been weak enough to get in a passion. He had sat as still as a statue while the Cornishman set forth his indictment, waiting to see how completely he had failed; and now that he knew that his plot, so deliberately laid, so patiently carried out, was only a bungling business after all—for the man *must* have bungled who fails so utterly—Mr. Lowther lost his head all in a moment, and abandoned himself to a sudden access of rage, that reduced him to the level of a wounded tiger.

It was scarcely with Francis that he was angry. What did it matter how this man spoke of him or thought of him? What did it matter that these other men should hear him accused of a baseness, which was only an intellectual improvement upon the vulgar process by which the gentlemanly birds of prey plucked the tender plumage of their victims? All this was nothing. It was against himself—against his own failure—that Harcourt Lowther's fury was raging; only, like all fury of that kind, it was ravenous for vengeance of some sort. It was only for about twenty seconds

that his claws were fastened on Francis Tredethlyn's throat. A Cornish heavy-weight is not exactly the kind of person for a delicately-built Sybarite to wrestle with very successfully.

"We are rather celebrated for this sort of thing in my county," Mr. Tredethlyn muttered between his set teeth, as he loosened Harcourt Lowther's grasp from his throat, and hurled him in a kind of bundle to a corner of the room, where he fell crashing down amongst the ruins of a dumb-waiter, half buried under a chaos of broken bottles and lobster-shells.

Roderick Lowther would have sprung upon his brother's foe in the next minute, but the other men hustled round him and hemmed him in.

"Don't you see the fellow's a Hercules?" cried one of them; "let him alone, Lowther."

"Let me go!" roared the diplomatist; "I know my brother's a false-hearted rascal, but I won't stand by and see a Lowther played at ball with by any boor in Christendom. Let me get at him, Boystock, or I shall hurt you." But Francis had walked quietly to the door, and turning with

his hand upon the lock, waited for a moment's pause in the confusion before he spoke.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you are witnesses that your friend attacked me. I have no quarrel with Mr. Roderick Lowther; and as I am the bigger man of the two, there would be no credit for either him or me in a scuffle between us. If Harcourt Lowther wants to see me, he will be able to find me any time this week at the Grand Hotel, Covent Garden; after this week I shall sail for South America by the first packet that leaves Liverpool."

He paused a second time. There was no answer. The diplomatist had thought better of his thirst for fraternal retribution.

"Why should I get myself into a mess about the beggar?" he thought; "he wouldn't see *me* out of a scrape, I daresay."

So Francis departed unquestioned: not to return to the Stuccoville mansion, but to walk up Southampton Street, and across Covent Garden, to seek a shelter in the old lodgings where he had lived so pleasantly in his bachelor days.

CHAPTER VIII.

POOR FRANK'S LETTER.

MAUDE shut herself in her own rooms after her interview with Francis, and refused to see any one except Julia. She wanted some one to cling to in her sudden distress, and was fain to throw herself upon the Irish girl's bosom for consolation.

Then Julia Desmond had her revenge. It was very sweet to see the woman who had usurped the cup of prosperity once held to her own lips brought down so low; more wretched in the midst of her wealth and grandeur than Julia had been in her lonely attic at Bayswater, with a July sun glaring in upon her through a curtainless window, and the drowsy voices of her pupils droning in her ears. The pleasure that thrilled through her breast as she held Maude Tredethlyn in her arms,

and heard her declare, amidst passionate sobs, that Francis had been false and base and wicked, and that she was the most miserable woman in the world, was a sensation more exquisite than Miss Desmond had ever known before. For the honour of humanity, that wicked pleasure did not last very long. The daughter of Patrick Macnamara Ryan O'Brien Desmond was not altogether base. Maude was at her feet, and she was avenged. It was her rival's insolent happiness —happiness always *does* seem insolent to the unhappy—that had galled her to the quick. The two women were on a level now, and Julia forgave her old companion.

"I told you he was a villain," she said; and that was the only unkind speech she uttered. After that, she was comforter, confidante, friend, and she was almost sorry to see the endurance of Maude's grief. "You have your fine house and your carriages still," she said, as the young wife sat on the ground at her feet in the abandonment of her sorrow; "you could never have married Francis Tredethlyn for any other reason than the

wealth he could give you. What does it matter to you whether he is true or false? You never loved him."

"No," answered Maude naïvely, "I suppose not. But it is so shameful of him to care for any body else. And from what Harcourt Lowther says, he does care for that horrible person; and to leave me, Julia, day after day, and to be—there—all the time—in a garden—smoking—looking as much at home as if he had lived there all his life—I never can forgive him, Julia!"

"Of course not," Miss Desmond replied promptly; "but I don't see that you need make yourself so very unhappy about his conduct. You will have a formal separation, I suppose. Your papa, or your papa's solicitors, will manage that, no doubt; and you will live quietly in a smaller house than this. You will not be able to go so much into society, you know; for it is so difficult for a woman who is separated from her husband to escape scandal, however careful she may be," Julia added, with considerable satisfaction. It is so nice to sit in the dust and mingle our sympa-

thetic tears with those of the fallen powers who have lately queened it over us.

Maude's sobs redoubled.

"Society!" she exclaimed. "I hate society! Yes, it's no use talking, Julia. I know what you're going to say about my going out to three parties a night, and so on; but I don't like it—nobody likes it. They get into the whirlpool, and there they are. If you go to Mrs. A.'s Thursday, you must go to Lady B.'s Friday, or you offend her; and if you go once, you must go on going, or it seems as if you didn't like the people you met; and then, if you don't ask people, you are accused of dropping them; and if you ask strange people, you are accused of picking them up; and if you always ask the same people, your parties are called slow; and if you ask different people, you are called capricious. I am so tired of the world, Julia," sighed Mrs. Tredethlyn. "When I drive any distance to dinner on an autumn evening, I always envy the people who live in little villas, and drink tea at seven o'clock in pretty parlours that I can see in the firelight. They seem *so*

happy. I never hear a muffin-bell—don't laugh, Julia; but there *is* something peculiar in a muffin-bell—without thinking how hollow my life is, compared to the lives of the people who eat the muffins. And then I fancy that I should have been so much happier in a pretty little cottage in St. John's Wood, with a tiny, tiny back-garden sloping down to the canal, and a still tinier garden in front for Floss to bark in. I used to think sometimes," continued Maude, dropping her voice and speaking with some slight embarrassment, "that Francis and I would get to understand each other better by and bye, and that we should lead quite a Darby-and-Joan sort of life, doing a great deal of good, and going out much less. But, of course, that hope is quite gone now. I can never endure his society again. I could never trust him. And oh, Julia, I *did* trust him so implicitly! I had such a belief in his goodness that I despised myself for not being better worthy of him. And to think that he should deceive me so cruelly; that he should have been deceiving me all along, leading a wicked life amongst wicked people for his

own pleasure; when I fancied that he was driven from his home by my indifference, and reproached myself so bitterly for being wanting in my duty to him."

In this strain poor Maude discoursed at intervals for some hours. Julia was very patient, sympathetic even, in a hard kind of way; but she bore with all her weight upon the evidence of Francis Tredethlyn's perfidy, and she drained the cup of her triumph to the very dregs.

It was not till the next morning that the letter which Francis had left in the library was delivered to his wife. She was sitting in her boudoir, with an untasted breakfast before her, and the sympathetic Julia on the other side of the table, when her maid brought the missive, which a housemaid had discovered at daybreak on her master's table, two or three hours before Mr. Tredethlyn's valet found the little bedroom behind the library untenanted, and perceived that his master had not slept at home.

The Cornishman's letter was very simply worded. Maude opened it hastily, in the hope that it might

contain some justification of her husband's conduct. But he did not even allude to his delinquencies, and confined himself to bidding an earnest and friendly farewell to the wife who had never loved him. Tears of disappointment, humiliation, regret, poured slowly down Maude's cheeks as she read the letter. It was the first time Francis had written to her since her marriage; and there was something almost strange to her in the sight of his bold commercial hand, whose accustomed regularity had been a little disturbed by the writer's agitation.

"My very dear Wife,—I write to you for the first time since it has been my privilege to address you by that sacred name. If I could tell you the pride and happiness I once felt in that privilege, when first you laid your hand in mine, when first I heard you called by my name, I should be a very different person from what I am; and then it is possible this letter need never have been written. I write to bid you good-bye, Maude; and I think the best proof I can give you

of my love is the proof I give you now, when I bring my mind to the necessity of our separation, and resign myself to the knowledge that I may never see your face again upon this earth.

"I will not tell you how soon I discovered your indifference—how soon another person demonstrated to me that your feeling towards me was even something worse than indifference; that it was dislike and contempt which I inspired in your mind. My dense ignorance of the world, and your amiable nature, would have prevented my making this discovery of my own accord. But there are always plenty of those 'good-natured friends' the man in the play talks about. *I found such a friend.* If you have any curiosity upon the subject, Rosa Grunderson, who is a good, honest-hearted little girl, will tell you the name of the man who opened my eyes to the full misery of my position. In writing this, Maude, I have no thought of reproach against *you*. To me you have been and always will be something so bright and lovely as to be amenable to none of the common laws which govern common natures. When

you offered to be my wife, you yielded to a generous impulse; and it is I who deserve reproach for having been so base in my blind selfishness as to accept the sacrifice you were willing to offer in repayment of a fancied obligation. I cannot undo the past; but I can at least set you in some manner free from the fetters you forged for yourself under the influence of that brief enthusiasm. So long as I live, one of the miseries of my life will be the knowledge that I shut you out of a brighter fate; that I deprive you of a more worthy companion; that the greatest sacrifice I can make in atonement of the past will only make you the lonely widow of a living husband. But I can at least rid you of the society of a man whose presence inspires you with disgust and loathing. Oh, Maude, I am quoting your own words; spoken so deliberately, so coldly, that I should be indeed mad and cowardly, were I to shrink from accepting them in their fullest import. I might have doubted until to-night; I might have hugged myself with the notion that a liar and a scoundrel, for his own base purposes, had taught me to think myself

despised and disliked; but your own lips have spoken, and I can doubt no longer. Oh, my darling, my pet, my beloved, this seems so like a reproach; but it is not, it is *not*.

"I am going to South America. When you read this, my preparations will no doubt have begun. If possible, I shall sail immediately. Of all the men who ever left England for that fiery young world out yonder, there was never, perhaps, any one better adapted to be happy and successful there than I am. I bid good-bye for ever to the idle dissipations, the drunken orgies, in which I have sometimes found distraction, but never happiness. And I begin a new life in a new field of labour. My uncle's money has been the root of all my misery, and I shall take very little of that useless gold to the other shore. I don't think I was ever guilty of any great folly while I was a poor man; but since I have been a rich one, my life has seemed one long mistake.

"I write so much about myself and my own plans because I do not want the memory of me, or of any sorrow which I may feel in this parting, to

cloud the brightness of your future; and I understand your generous nature well enough to know that you will be happier if you can believe that I am happy. Oh, Maude, if you could know how anxious I am that the life before you should be a bright and happy one, you might almost forgive me for the pain my selfish folly has inflicted upon you! My poor, generous-hearted girl! my innocent darling! you thought it was so light a thing to link your life to the life of a man whom you could not love; and you have borne your burden so quietly. I cannot release you from the chain that binds you to me, but I will do my best to make that chain a light one. And, for the rest, I go to a country in which life and death walk hand in hand together. I take with me all an ignorant man's love of adventure, a soldier's indifference to danger. Wear your chain patiently, darling,—you may not have to wear it long. But one word of warning from the man who has loved you so foolishly, and, until this night, so selfishly. You have married hastily once. Weigh well what you do if ever you marry again. If you accepted for your

husband an ignorant West-country boor when you married me, I was at least an honest man. If I die, Maude, and you are free to make a second marriage, be sure that the husband of your choice has something of your own noble character; as well as some smattering of the accomplishments that please you, and the tricky jargon about art and literature which passes for cleverness. I was anxious once to make myself a gentleman for your sake, Maude; and when we have been visiting together, I have listened to the men's talk, for I wanted to find out how it was done; and you could never guess how spurious some of that brilliant conversation sounds to a man who *only* listens. I used to read some of your Mudie books in my own room sometimes of a morning,—Froude, and Carlyle, Burton, Barth, and so on; and I've heard men laying down the law about them at night, and I have known from their talk that they hadn't read a page of the book itself, and were only airing the second-hand opinions picked up out of a review.

"I saw you shudder once, Maude, because I

didn't know it was the right thing to say 'Barkley Square;' and pronounced the word as it is spelt. But, oh, what bosh I've heard the Barkley-Squarers talk sometimes about things I do understand! I've heard a man at a dinner-party hold forth about our convict system sometimes, and transportation, and Van Diemen's Land, till I've been inclined to get up and do something to him with a carving-knife; and oh, the self-satisfied manner of the creature, and the way he has lifted his eyebrows and looked at *me*, if I ventured to express any opinion upon the subject! In South America there may be fever and disease, perhaps—privation, danger; but there will be no Barkley Square. I may meet with Aztecs, who may maltreat or even assassinate me; but they won't have little bits of glass that they can't see through to hitch into their eyes whenever I speak to them. And they won't lift their eyebrows and begin to whisper about me the moment I enter a room. And I shall never hear them say, 'Oh, the *rich* Tredethlyn, is it? Gad, what a clodhopper!'

"Why do I write about these things, Maude,

when I am writing to bid you good-bye for ever? Only because I want you to believe there is *something* wanting even in the perfect world in which you live. If my death should set you free in your youth, marry again, dear, by all means; but marry a man whose truth and loyalty have been proved by a life of unblemished honour; marry a man who has set his mark upon the age — who has *done something;* for such a man is scarcely likely to be a scoundrel. Above all, darling, accept my warning against *one* man: *do not marry Harcourt Lowther.*

"All the privileges that you have enjoyed during your bondage you shall retain in your freedom. Before sailing, I shall make my will, in which you will be left residuary legatee, and recipient of the bulk of my fortune. While I live, your income will be large enough to support the style in which you have lived during the past year; and there will be a wide margin left for the indulgence of every impulse of your generous heart. I shall place full directions as to the management of my fortune in the hands of my solicitors,

Messrs. Kursdale and Scardon; and they will call on you by my direction to explain your position immediately after receiving my instructions. You will find yourself the mistress of the larger part of the income derived from my late uncle's investments and from the Cornish estate, and you will have no further trouble than to sign your name now and then, when the lawyers want you to do so. In the interim I enclose a cheque for 500*l.*, so that you may not be without ready money. Your father's affairs are now, he tells me, in a very easy state, and I do not leave him in troubled water. He may consider you his creditor for the interest of the thirty thousand sunk in his business; and I don't suppose he will find you a very importunate one.

"And now good-bye indeed. I leave you with all confidence in your noble heart, your high principles. You are too good and pure to be otherwise than happy. Far away on the Pampas, lying under canvas, with the long silvery trail of the moonlight on the gray expanse beyond my tent, the whisper of faint winds among the

long grasses sounding in my ears, I shall think of you, and see you happy in the old English garden at Twickenham, loitering on the terrace by your father's side. In that trackless loneliness, fever-parched perhaps, and far away from the chance of water, I shall think of the blue English river, but *never* think of it without seeing your image standing by the tide, your bright face reflected in the glassy stream. Oh, Maude, I have loved you so dearly, so fondly; and now that it comes to saying good-bye, it seems almost as difficult to tear myself from this lifeless sheet of paper, as it would be to take my lips away from yours in a last long kiss. My pet, my darling, God bless you, and good-bye! Think of me sometimes; but never with pain. Some midnight, when you are waltzing in a crowded ball-room, with a brazen band braying in your ears, and the hum of a hundred voices round about you, think that in some savage wilderness a man is kneeling under God's blue sky, praying for you as few people are prayed for on this earth; think sometimes, if a special peace

comes down upon you, like the cool shadow we have watched drop slowly upon the river when the sun was down,—think, darling, that I am saying, 'God keep and guard her safely through the night! God fill her heart with peace and gladness, whether she sleeps or wakes!'

"And so, my own dear wife, for the first and last time in my life, I sign myself your true and loyal husband,

"FRANCIS TREDETHLYN."

Julia had fluttered out of the room and into the little conservatory, where there were always faded leaves to be snipped off, or bird-cages to be replenished with fresh water. Miss Desmond, in her darkest mood, was too much a lady to sit by and stare while Maude possessed herself of the contents of her husband's letter. She lingered among the twittering canary-birds and sprawling ferns so long as she considered that delicacy demanded she should be absent, and then she strolled back to the breakfast-table with a look of supreme unconsciousness. But she gave a

little scream as she glanced across the table at Mrs. Tredethlyn, and flew to the bell. Maude had finished her letter, which lay in scattered sheets at her feet, and she had fallen back upon the sofa-pillows in a dead faint.

CHAPTER IX.

ELEANOR DROPS IN UPON ROSAMOND.

It is strange what virtues we are apt to discover in the thing we have lost. After recovering from her fainting-fit, Maude Tredethlyn wept as bitterly for the loss of her husband as if he had been the first choice of her maiden heart. A young lady told Mr. de Quincey that, being on the point of drowning, she saw in one instant her whole life exhibited before her in its minutest details, like a vast picture;—and so the young wife, reading her husband's solemn farewell, beheld in a moment the picture of her courtship and married life, and saw how good he had been to her. Yes, in that one moment a thousand instances—such trifling instances, some of them — of his goodness and devotion, his enduring love, his patient self-abnegation, flashed upon

her, and her heart smote her with a bitter anguish as she perceived her own unworthiness.

"I had no right to take his love as I take the love of my dogs," she thought; "giving him nothing in return for his devotion." At first, as she read her husband's epistle, she smiled at his talk of leaving her, and thought how easy a thing it would be to lay her hand upon his shoulder and draw him down to his old place at her feet. She forgot all about the cottage at Petersham when she thought this. And then, as she read further and further, she recognised the solemn meaning of the letter, and felt that it was indeed a farewell. Then a sudden mist came between her and the page; all the machinery in London seemed buzzing and booming in her ears; and she fell back amongst the downy cushion, whiter than the pure ground of the rosebud chintz which Harcourt Lowther had selected for the upholstery of her nest.

She recovered very quickly under the influence of half a bottle of toilet-vinegar; and then there were more confidences to be poured into Julia's ear, when the maid, who was so sympathetic, and so

ravenously eager to know why her mistress had fainted, was fairly out of the room.

Maude read Julia little bits of the letter, leaving off every now and then to demand pathetically *what* she was to do.

"He surely c-c-couldn't write like that, Julia, if he were what Harcourt Lowther says he is," sobbed Mrs. Tredethlyn. "He says I spoke to him coldly and deliberately. Oh, if he could only know what a passion I was in! There must be some horrible mistake; and if there is, what a wretch I must have seemed to him last night! Julia, advise me! give me some help! My husband must not go to America. There is a whole week for me to act in. What am I to do?"

"How *can* I advise you?" asked Julia. "I am so entirely in the dark—and you too. If Mr. Tredethlyn had given you *any* explanation of his presence at that strange house, domiciled so familiarly with that strange woman, you might accept it—if you could—and believe him. But he does not even attempt to explain or to justify his conduct. He passes it over in a manner which,

I must confess, seems very ominous. To me, Maude, his silence is a tacit confession of his guilt."

Poor Maude turned the leaves of her husband's letter, and looked wistfully at the blotted pages. If she could have only found some brief explanation of that Petersham business any where—in a postscript—a parenthesis! But there was none; and Mrs. Tredethlyn put the epistle into her pocket, and looked at Julia with a very rueful countenance. Unluckily, she forgot that she had brought no specific charge against her husband, but had only attacked him in that vaguely denunciatory manner which is so essentially feminine.

"What a child she is!" thought Miss Desmond, as she watched her friend's tear-blotted face and quivering lip. "If *I* had a pair of high-stepping ponies to drive in the Park, and a couple of grooms to sit behind me, I would demand no explanation of my husband's absences, though he were to stay away from me for ten years at a stretch."

But it was the very reverse of this convenient code of morality to which Julia gave utterance presently, when she spoke to Maude.

"You ask me for my advice," she said. "If I am to give it frankly, I must own that in your place I would not touch Mr. Tredethlyn's hand in friendship until he had accounted fully and conclusively for his presence in that garden yesterday. I would permit no reservations on the part of my husband; and I should be inclined to think that a secret kept from me was only another name for a wrong done to me."

Maude was silent for some minutes, wiping the tears from her face, and trying to escape from the demonstrative sympathy of a Skye terrier, who had been frantic at the sight of his mistress's distress; and then she exclaimed, with sudden energy that almost startled Miss Desmond,

"Yes, I will take your advice, Julia; and Francis *shall* explain himself—as—as I'm sure he can."

This was a challenge which Julia was too wise to take up; for she saw that the wind had set violently in Francis Tredethlyn's favour since Maude's perusal of his letter.

"I will insist upon an explanation from my

husband; but before seeing him I will do what I should have done yesterday. I will go to that cottage at Petersham, and *see* the lady who was sitting in the garden with Francis yesterday afternoon. It is my right as a wife to know my husband's friends."

"You will see the—person," exclaimed Julia, on the tips of her lips, as the French say.

"I will."

"Well, perhaps, after all, it is not a bad plan," answered Miss Desmond, after a pause. "And if you *do* see that person, I daresay you will hear something unpleasant," she thought: "it is only fair there should be some counterbalance to your grooms and ponies, even beyond Pickford's vans, and the sharp corner in Dean Street, Park Lane."

"Julia, you will go with me?" asked Maude, putting down her Skye terrier. "No, Floss, not to-day. Oh! I wonder whether *you* were ever married, and had this sort of thing to go through!—You'll go to Petersham with me, won't you, Julia dear?"

"Of course I will," answered Miss Desmond promptly; "it is a part of my *métier*. But how do you mean to go?"

"Oh, we'll drive."

"Your ponies?" asked Julia spitefully.

The "steppers" were a late acquisition. Maude's childish cry of rapture at the sight of the Countess of Zarborough's equipage had sent Francis off to Tattersall's to bid for a pair of black ponies that Harcourt Lowther and his set had pronounced "clippers." You see an ignorant man's love is such a vulgar passion that it will express itself in this sordid way.

"Oh, Julia," cried Maude, "how *could* you? As if I would drive those frivolous ponies with a frivolous parasol fastened to my whip, and those two listening grooms behind me, when my heart is almost broken by Frank's conduct."

"Then you will go in the barouche?"

"Yes, and I can leave the carriage some distance from the house," Maude answered, with her hand upon the bell; "and we'll go at once, Julia dear,—if you're sure you've finished breakfast,"

added Mrs. Tredethlyn, looking piteously at the cup of stagnant chocolate and unbroken roll, which bore witness to her own incapacity to eat or drink.

Of course Julia declared that she had breakfasted—as completely as a companion had any right to breakfast, she inferred by her manner; so the two ladies adjourned to their apartments. Mrs. Tredethlyn found her maid in her dressing-room, oppressed by such tender anxieties with regard to the adjustment of Maude's bonnet and shawl, that she was not to be shaken off till her mistress stepped into the barouche, and even then contrived to be the medium of communication with the coachman, to the setting aside of a stolid Jeames, who was so utterly weary of life in general as not even to be often interested in other people's business.

The confidante in white muslin is apt to have a hard time of it when Tilburina's affairs go badly; but Julia endured her burden with sublime patience. Maude, bewailing the inconstancy of her husband one moment, and lauding his devotion in the next, might now and then degenerate into an

inconsistent bore; but, at the worst, she was more endurable than Maude insolently happy,—a radiant floating creature, all lace flounces and gauzy sleeves, like one of Mr. Buckner's portraits. Julia enacted her part of confidante very creditably during the drive from Stuccoville to Petersham, and submitted graciously to be left in the carriage, in a shady curve of the winding road, with the Skye terriers and the last new novel to keep her company, while Mrs. Tredethlyn went alone to face her rival.

Perhaps Maude's heart sank just a little with something akin to fear, as she tripped along the dusty road in dainty high-heeled boots and flounced petticoats, whose embroideries flickered to and fro in shadowy arabesques upon the sunlit ground. She was not at all strong-minded. Imagine Waller's Sacharissa stepping out of her coach in Eastchepe, with a Negro page behind her, and one of the Duchess of Portsmouth's favourite spaniels nestling in the perfumed lining of her muff, bent upon a visit to a money-lender; or Pope's Belinda alighting from her sedan to attend

a meeting of creditors. Imagine any thing that is incongruous, or absurd, or impossible, and it will be scarcely more out of keeping than this picture of Maude Tredethlyn going alone to meet her rival, under the shelter of a point-lace parasol. And yet this injured young wife was as sincerely miserable as if she had worn sackcloth and ashes, or the sombre draperies which Miss Bateman has made so familiar to us in her impersonation of the jilted Leah.

Mrs. Tredethlyn went straight to the cottage with the old-fashioned iron gate and the ivy-bordered wall. A womanly instinct guided her, as by a kind of inspiration, to the spot where she had seen her husband so much at home with a nameless and unknown creature. An air of prim respectability pervaded the place, which Maude inspected as she waited for admission, and peered inquisitively through the iron scrollwork. There were none of the rose-coloured curtains and china flower-stands, the yelping lap-dogs and twittering birds, which Mrs. Tredethlyn had been taught to associate with those inhabitants of an outer world, in whom she perceived only over-done imitations

of herself. Every thing here had a prim countrified prettiness of its own; and looking across the smooth lawn, Maude saw a slender girlish figure in a cotton-dress bending over a flower-bed, while a little boy stood by with a tiny watering-pot, whose contents he dribbled industriously over his own toes.

Maude's summons was responded to by an elderly woman in black. She was very grim and stern, as people who dote upon small children usually are; and she was no other than the eminently respectable person at Chelsea, who wore rusty bombazine in mourning for the better days which lay far back in some remote period beyond the memory of her oldest acquaintance. This person carried Maude's card to the lady in the cotton-dress, and then swooped down upon the little boy with the watering-pot, and carried him away struggling.

Maude, still without the citadel, watched the girlish face as it bent over her card. She expected astonishment, confusion, defiance,—any thing except what she saw, which was a half-

pleased smile, a look of hesitation, and then a little glance towards the gate, and a cry of remonstrance to the elderly person now invisible.

"Oh, Mrs. Clinnock, how could you leave that lady outside? The key! ah, I see it's in the gate." Maude's fancied rival had crossed the little lawn by this time, and Rosamond was only separated from Eleanor by the iron scroll-work. "Dear Mrs. Tredethlyn, how very rude you must think my nurse! But so many people have called, out of mere curiosity I am sure, and I am so afraid of strangers—Francis knows that—for he knows how often he has begged me to see you; and it was only yesterday that I gave way, and said he might tell you all about me. But I didn't think you would come so soon," said Rosamond, with sudden tears welling up to her innocent brown eyes. She had opened the gate and admitted Maude while she talked, and the two women were now standing face to face.

Mrs. Tredethlyn's mystification was depicted upon her countenance, which at first expressed only her complete bewilderment; then a chilling

expression came over her face, a scornful smile curved her lip, and she looked at her rival with her head poised as haughtily as ever Eleanor's could have been when she offered Lord Clifford's daughter that agreeable choice between the bowl and the dagger.

"Oh, I see," she thought; "this person is trying to disarm my suspicions by her cool impertinence."

"It was so kind of you to come," murmured Rosamond timidly. She was beginning to feel rather afraid of this haughty lady, who made no response to her warm greeting. "I did not think that I should see you so soon."

"No, I daresay not," answered Mrs. Tredethlyn; "I should scarcely imagine that you expected to see me at all."

Rosamond, otherwise Susan, clasped her hands and flushed crimson to the roots of her hair.

"Ah, then, you too are unkind, like my father," she cried piteously. "You do not believe what Francis told you."

Maude was almost too indignant to remark

that piteous accent. It was not a gentle creature in distress that she saw. Jealousy looks through a medium that distorts the simplest objects into evil and threatening shapes. Mrs. Tredethlyn imagined that she beheld a shameless adventuress, who sought to disarm her justifiable suspicions by social histrionics.

"By what right do you call my husband by his Christian name?" she asked indignantly.

"By what right!" stammered Susan, alarmed by the angry tones in which the question had been asked. "What else should I call him? I have called him Francis all my life, except when we were children, and then I called him Frank. Oh, he has been so good to me, Mrs. Tredethlyn; and he knows that the marriage was a real one. Oh, pray, pray don't look so coldly at me; don't doubt my word and his. I am as true and pure a wife as you are, though I have no husband's arm to lean upon, though even the name my husband gave me may be a false one."

Maude stared at the earnest face in new bewilderment. Not even jealousy could distort the

expression of that face into any thing but innocence.

"What does it all mean?" she cried at last; "who and what are you?"

"Susan Turner, Oliver Tredethlyn's daughter, and Francis Tredethlyn's cousin," answered Susan, considerably puzzled in her turn; "who else could you suppose me to be, Mrs. Tredethlyn? Surely Francis told you all about me, or you could never have known where to find me."

"No, he told me nothing," exclaimed Maude; and then she pounced suddenly upon poor astonished Susy, and kissed her as she had never in all her life kissed any one before.

"Oh, you dear!" she cried; "oh, you darling! To think that you should be only his cousin after all, when I thought that — when I was wicked enough to think—"

Mrs. Tredethlyn did not say what she had thought, but bestowed another shower of kisses upon Susan.

"You pet!" she exclaimed; "and to think that I should never guess you were his cousin;

and that he should never tell me, the silly fellow! And he let me go on at him too last night as if he had committed all sorts of crimes, and did not even deny them. And you are like him too. Yes, I'm sure you are; there's an expression about the eyes. Yes, there really is. Oh, how dearly I shall love you! I remember Francis speaking of you once; but he was very reserved upon the subject, and I did not like to question him. And so you really are his uncle Oliver's daughter! then we are cousins, you know, dear; almost sisters—and I never had a sister—or even a friend who was *quite* like a sister," added Maude, with a remorseful recollection of Miss Desmond waiting in the carriage.

She could have run on for an hour at a stretch, in her delight at the discovery that her husband was not a villain. The two women walked up and down the lawn together, while Susan related all her sad little history, and received Maude's tender assurances of sympathy and love.

Mrs. Tredethlyn was told how good her husband had been to his friendless cousin; and was

pleased to dwell fondly on the story of Frank's kindness, his selection of that pretty house, his purchase of the furniture, and, above all, his goodness to the little boy.

Maude wanted Susan to go straight home with her in the carriage; but the Cornish girl clung to her sheltered home, and the iron gate that screened her from intrusive strangers.

"I am not used to the people amongst whom you live," she said; "it is very kind of you to wish to take me—but I could never be happy amongst strangers; and Robert and I are *so* happy here!"

"And I came to break in upon your happiness like a horrible jealous fury," cried Maude; "but you see good has come out of evil; for now we have met, we shall love each other dearly always, sha'n't we, Susan?. Call me Maude, please. And oh, my dear Susan, I have all sorts of troubles still to go through; for Frank was so offended by what I said last night, that he has written me a dreadful letter, in which he says he means to sail for America directly. But of course he won't.

He never could leave me like that, could he, dear? And when I leave you, I shall drive straight home; and if he hasn't been home, I shall go on to his solicitors, Messrs. Something and Something, Gray's Inn,—I shall know their names when I see them in the Directory,—and of course they'll know his address wherever he is; and I shall go to him, and ask him to forgive me for having behaved so badly, and to-morrow he and I will come together, Susan. And now kiss me once more, dear, and *au revoir;* for I have a friend waiting for me in the carriage a little way off; and if her book doesn't happen to be interesting, I'm afraid she'll be cross, for I'm sure I must have been an unconscionable time."

There was a little embrace, and then Susan opened the gate and Maude tripped away. The vulgar gravel seemed like empyreal air under her high-heeled boots this time; so changed were her feelings since she had discovered how deeply she had wronged her husband by the shapeless jealousies that Harcourt Lowther had inspired in her breast.

Julia looked with astonishment at her friend's altered countenance as Maude apologised for the length of her absence, while the *blasé* footman let down the steps; she was still more astonished when the carriage drove townwards, and Maude gushed into French, to the discomfiture of the footman, who had a habit of looking behind him for imaginary vehicles when his mistress's conversation happened to interest Jim.

In French Maude informed Julia that the mythic rival had melted into a "little cousin," who was "all that there is of the most charming," "an all young girl," "a candid angel," whom Mrs. Tredethlyn was ready to take to her heart forthwith. Julia found it a great deal harder to sympathise with Maude's happiness than with her misery.

But the happiness did not last very long; for on inquiry at Stuccoville, Maude found that her husband had not been home; and on penetrating Holborn-wards to Gray's Inn, to the disgust of the languid footman, she met with a second disappointment in the offices of Messrs. Kursdale and

Scardon, who had heard nothing of the absent Mr. Tredethlyn. After this Maude drove homewards with a very sad countenance, and was glad to shrink from even Julia's sympathy, and to hide herself in her own rooms, where she paced disconsolately to and fro, listening for the crunching wheels and banging door of a hansom cab, and stopping every now and then to look hopelessly out into the monotonous street.

CHAPTER X.

GONE.

ALL through the dreary day, and far into the still more dreary night, Maude Tredethlyn waited and listened for her husband's coming. She could not believe that he would hold to the purpose so earnestly expressed in his letter. His resolution had no doubt been fixed as the Monument itself while he wrote; for he had written immediately after his wife's unjustifiable denunciation of him; but surely long before the time came for action Francis Tredethlyn's purpose would waver, and the faithful slave would come back to his place at the feet of his mistress. In any case he would surely seek some explanation of Maude's anger.

"He never could be so cruel as to leave me because of a few foolish words," thought Mrs. Tredethlyn; "he could not be so unjust as not to give me the opportunity of explaining myself."

But on reading Francis Tredethlyn's letter for the third or fourth time, Maude discovered how complete the estrangement was that had divided her from her husband. The indignant reproaches inspired by unreasoning jealousy had been received by Francis as the deliberate utterance of a contemptuous dislike that had reached a point at which it could no longer be hidden under the mask of fashionable indifference. Mrs. Tredethlyn perceived, as she read that mournful letter, that, in her conduct of the previous night, her husband had only seen the miserable climax of his married life. He beheld, as he fancied, his wife's silent scorn transformed all at once into passionate reproach; and the proud spirit which breathes in all simple natures had asserted itself in the farewell letter which Maude read through a mist of tears.

"He thinks I married him for his money, and that I have disliked and despised him," she thought sadly. "Ah, if he could know how often I have reproached myself for being unworthy of his devotion,—if he could know how my heart has

sunk day by day as I have seen the breach grow wider between us! I fancied that I had lost his love, and yet this letter is full of the old devotion."

Maude awoke from the brief morning slumber that generally succeeds a sleepless night to a second day of suspense. She did not talk to Julia of her troubles now. They were growing too serious for feminine discussion or friendly sympathy. Mrs. Tredethlyn shut herself in her own rooms, and would see no one. She pleaded a headache, and the plea was no empty excuse; for when her all-absorbing anxieties permitted her to remember the existence of her head, she knew that it ached with a dull heavy pain which all the eau-de-Cologne in her dressing-case could not assuage. She roamed hopelessly to and fro between her bedroom and dressing-room, and failed most utterly in her attempt to hide her distress from the omniscient eye of her maid.

The second day passed, and there was no Francis. In the evening Maude despatched a messenger to Mr. Kursdale with a note of inquiry about Francis: had his solicitors heard or seen

any thing of him; and so on. The messenger was to wait an answer. But as old-established solicitors do not usually reside in Gray's Inn, the messenger found only darkness and stout oaken doors when he obeyed his mistress's behest. Maude wrote another letter that evening, addressed to Harcourt Lowther, and containing only these few lines, hurriedly written, and with all the important words underlined:

"DEAR MR. LOWTHER,—Have you seen my husband since the day before yesterday? He *left home* on Tuesday night, and I have *not seen him since.* I am *terribly* anxious about him. I have *been to Petersham,* and have *seen the lady.* We were *quite wrong* about her, and I am *ashamed* of myself for having been *so foolish.* She is a *near relation* of Frank's; and his conduct to her has been *most noble.* Pray find him *immediately,* if possible, and show him this letter.

"Yours sincerely,

"M. T.

"*Thursday night.*"

A pleasant letter this for Harcourt Lowther to receive the next day, as he lay helpless on a lodging-house sofa, with his head and face sadly dilapidated by the effects of his fall under a shower of broken wine-glasses and cruets.

He groaned aloud as he read Maude's missive.

"Is there any possibility of comprehending a woman's tactics?" he muttered. "She writes as if this boor were an idolised husband. Is it all hypocrisy—or what? So the bubble of jealousy has burst, and the young person at the Petersham cottage *is* a cousin, after all; and Francis has kicked up his heels; and I lie here as miserably bruised and battered as if I had just been beaten in a fight for the championship, at the very time when I most want to be up and astir."

Yes, Mr. Lowther was a prisoner. He had been seriously shaken by the scuffle with Francis, and had been in the doctor's hands since the unpleasant termination of his supper-party. But this was not the worst. It was the disfigurement of his handsome face which Harcourt took most deeply to heart. A black eye or a scarred fore-

head will keep a man as close a captive as a warrant of committal to the Tower. At the very moment when the sudden entanglement of his web threatened to render all past efforts useless, when the schemer had most need of his dexterity, Harcourt Lowther found himself an unpresentable object, and knew that he must spend dreary weeks of seclusion before he dared emerge into the world once more, and take up the disordered threads which he still hoped to weave into a harmonious network. Imagine Paris, with all his plans laid for the abduction of Helen, brought suddenly to a standstill by a score of vulgar cuts and bruises, the sight of any one of which might have restored the lady to a sense of her duty. Harcourt Lowther, with his face bandaged, felt himself a contemptible creature, a modern Samson without the glorious remnant of a Samson's strength. For the first time in his life the fine gentleman discovered how much he depended on his handsome face, and what a lost wretch he would be without it.

He felt a savage rage against Roderick, who

strolled in and out of the room half the morning, dressing and breakfasting by instalments, smoking, and writing letters, and crackling the daily papers, as it seemed to Harcourt, more persistently than newspapers were ever crackled before. *He* was free to sally forth after his careful toilet, while his junior lay on that rickety sofa as furious in his wretched helplessness as some wounded hyena. Roderick had volunteered to call upon Francis at the Covent Garden hotel, to demand a reckoning for the scuffle at the supper-party; but Harcourt declined the friendly offer.

"As soon as I can leave the house, I will go to him myself," he said. "The fellow's talk about going abroad is all bombast, I daresay. He will be sneaking back to his wife's apron-string now that I am laid by the heels."

When Harcourt had read Maude's letter, he tossed it over to his brother.

"Do you know how to reckon that up?" he asked. "What does it mean?"

Mr. Lowther the elder had by no means a high estimate of the female character. In his idea of

the sex, the woman who was not a profound simpleton was only something very much worse than a simpleton.

"The fellow has *not* gone back to his wife; so that's one point in your favour, at any rate," said Roderick, after reading Maude's epistle. "I daresay he'll go altogether to the bad now, at a railroad pace, and finish himself off before the year is out. The lady's anxious inquiries about her husband may be read in more ways than one. This letter *may* be only intended to put *you au courant* as to the state of affairs. Unluckily, that ugly scar about your nose will prevent your calling on Mrs. Tredethlyn for some weeks. But I don't mind being brotherly for once in a way; and I'll look in at the Stuccoville mansion this afternoon, if you like. Virtue is sometimes rewarded, and there is just a chance that I may see the lovely Grunderson, and improve the occasion."

Harcourt, after a little deliberation, consented to this arrangement. His confidence in the honour of his brother was about as small as it could be; but as the interests of the two Antipholi were in

this instance not antagonistic, he could scarcely have any thing to fear from Roderick's intervention.

"You can tell Mrs. Tredethlyn that I am seriously ill," he said, when his brother was leaving him. "If you could drop a hint or two about a rapid decline—a secret sorrow undermining a constitution that was originally delicate—the sword and the scabbard, and so on; it would only be friendly to do so. Of course I have seen nothing of Francis since Tuesday, which is perfectly true; only you need say nothing of Tuesday night—curse him!" muttered Harcourt, with a lively recollection of the wounds inflicted by a broken vinegar-cruet, and the pernicious effects of the adulterated vinegar, as exhibited in his inflamed eyes. "You can take care to let Mrs. Tredethlyn understand that her husband has returned to his old haunts and his old companions; and that any anxiety she may be so absurd as to feel about him is wasted upon a person who would be the first to laugh at her folly."

"Dear boy, I have not served my country for

nothing," answered the diplomatist. "You may trust in my discretion and in my power to make the best of an opportunity. The people who plan a conversation beforehand never are able to talk according to their programme. The other party doesn't give the necessary cues. The man who trusts to the inspiration of the moment never makes a failure. The divine *afflatus* is always right; but you can't pump the sacred wind into a man with vulgar bellows. It comes, dear boy; and it will come to your humble servant, I have no doubt. I shall dine at the St. James's, and I've two or three places to go to in the evening; so I leave you to your reflections and the goulard-water. Adieu."

The diplomatist had no opportunity of serving his brother by any sentimental hints about secret sorrows and mortal illness; for Maude sent Julia Desmond to receive her visitor, and to hear anything he might have to say about Francis. Mrs. Tredethlyn would see no one and would go nowhere. Julia had been busy all the morning writing excuses to people whose invitations had

been accepted. Miss Grunderson had called, and had sent up pencilled supplications upon the backs of cards, imploring her dear Mrs. Tredethlyn to see her, if only for a few minutes; but Maude had been inexorable. There are sorrows which friendship is powerless to soothe; and in the time of such sorrow noisy friendship is above all things intolerable. Maude shuddered as she thought of Miss Grunderson's warm paws and schoolgirl endearments; so Rosa was sent away disconsolate.

Roderick Lowther would have been very well contented to loiter in Mrs. Tredethlyn's morning-room talking to Julia, whose half-haughty, half-defiant manner had a wonderful fascination for him; but that young lady gave him no opportunity of dawdling. She had seen his tactics with regard to Miss Grunderson, and took care to let him know that she understood his diplomacy; but she listened to all his insinuations against Francis, and he saw her eyes brighten as he uttered them.

"She will convey my hints to Mrs. Tredethlyn," thought the diplomatist, "and they

won't lose by her interpretation; so I've done that fellow a service, and wasted my morning, since Miss Grunderson is not to be seen."

But on leaving Julia Mr. Lowther decided on speculating a call upon Rosa's papa. There was always the chance of seeing the young lady; and as Mrs. Tredethlyn's house could no longer afford a platform for the carrying out of Roderick's matrimonial schemes, it was absolutely necessary that he should try a bold stroke and advance matters. He had ascertained Rosa's address, and had no difficulty in finding the Grunderson mansion, which was close at hand. He was not very certain about the number of the house, but selected it unhesitatingly from its fellows for the vivid greenness of its blinds, and the intense newness which pervaded every object that was visible through unshrouded windows of plate-glass. The Grunderson mansion bared its inner splendours unflinchingly to the eyes of the passer-by; and Mr. Grunderson's dining-room, superb in pollard oak, and with the Grunderson arms blazing on the scarlet-morocco backs of the chairs, revealed itself to the

very core of its heart to every butterman's apprentice or butcher's boy who brought his wares to the area-gate. Thus Roderick Lowther found it very difficult not to make his perception of Mr. Grundersön, seated at the head of his table with a substantial luncheon before him, unpleasantly palpable while he rang the visitor's bell. Fortune favoured the diplomatist, for the hospitable millionaire insisted on his being ushered into the dining-room; very much to the discomfiture of Rosa, who was partaking of an unfashionable plate of underdone beef from the sirloin before her papa, and who had a big bottle containing some yellow compound in the way of pickle, and ornamented by a blazing label, on her right hand, and an imperial pint of Guiness's stout on her left. The stout and the embarrassment produced by Mr. Lowther's appearance combined to dye Rosa's cheeks with a very vivid carnation; but the diplomatist would have been less than a diplomatist if he had not appeared supremely unconscious of the two bottles and the underdone beef.

"Sit ye down, Mr. Lowther, and make your-

self at home," exclaimed the hospitable Mr. Grunderson. "A knife and fork for this gentleman, Thomas; and look sharp about it. You'll find this here as fine a bit of beef as ever was cut from an Aberdeen bullock; and there ain't no bullocks equal to a Scotch short-horn, go where you will. Let me give you a slice out of the alderman's walk, which was a name my father always gave to the undercut; and a very good father he was too, though he never thought of my sittin' down to table upon the very spot where he built hisself a tool-house forty year ago, when you couldn't have got six pound an acre per annum for any ground about here. There's a pigeon-pie at the other end of the table, and there's some of your foreign kickshaws,—cutlets a la curl-papers, and mutton-chops a la smashed potato, *I* call 'em; for I'm not a young man, Mr. Lowther, and I can't remember your *soubeeses*, and your *maintenongs*, and your *jardineers*, and so on, as my daughter can. We don't have the men to wait at lunch, for my daughter says it isn't manners; and I'm very glad it ain't, for I can't say I enjoy my meals when I

have to take 'em with a couple of fellows shoving vegetable-dishes and sauce-boats at me every two minutes, and never shoving the right ones; for I'm blest if I ever knew 'em yet to shove me the cucumber before I'd half-finished my salmon, though they do call themselves experienced servants. Howsomedever, if we must dine ally Rousse, and wrap our mutton-chops in greasy paper and call 'em maintennong, we must, and there's an end of it; but I don't mind confessing to you, Mr. Lowther, that this is the time I make *my* dinner, and it's no use frowning at me, Rosa, for I don't care who knows it."

Mr. Lowther, whose luncheon generally consisted of a draught of seltzer-and-sherry and one small biscuit, escaped the infliction of one of Mr. Grunderson's plates of beef by a judicious manœuvre, and helped himself to a morsel of pigeon-pie. But before doing so, he allowed his eyes to wander about the walls, in contemplation of some impossible conglomerations of brown rockery and soapsud sky, which Mr. Grunderson called his Sallivaters; and thus gave Rosa time to dismiss

her bottles and her plate, and to recover from her embarrassment.

After this every thing went very smoothly. Mr. Grunderson expanded under the influence of bottled stout and Madeira, and was very loquacious; but sinking presently into a rather stertorous slumber, which he called forty winks, and which generally lasted about an hour and a half, the *ci-devant* market-gardener left Rosa and Roderick to their own resources. On this Mr. Lowther would have departed, but the candid Rosa begged him to remain. She had kept up a visiting acquaintance with most of her old school-fellows, and as she was perpetually making new acquaintances, she was positively besieged by callers, and had a tea-drinking institution, which she called a kettle-drum, almost every afternoon. The idea of exhibiting the elegant diplomatist to her feminine circle was eminently delightful to Miss Grunderson; and as soon as her papa had begun to snore with undisguised vehemence, she conducted Roderick to the drawing-room, where there were as many albums, and perfume-caskets, and ormolu

workboxes, and enamelled book-slides, and *solitaire* boards, as would have stocked one of Messrs. Parkins and Gotto's show-rooms, and where a grand piano, scattered with all the easiest polkas in the gaudiest covers, testified to Rosa's taste for music.

Miss Grunderson's kettle-drum visitors began to assemble almost immediately; and before long Rosa's drawing-room was full of young ladies in overpowering bonnets and transparent cloaks of every imaginable tissue. The male element was very much in the minority at Miss Grunderson's gatherings, and was chiefly represented by speechless younger brothers, who came in sulky submission to overbearing sisters, and who lounged in uncomfortable attitudes upon Rosa's most fragile chairs, spilt their tea upon the velvet table-covers, rarely moved without knocking something down, and left dingy thumb-marks in all Rosa's albums. Amongst such as these Roderick shone like a star of the first magnitude, and Miss Grunderson exhibited him with unspeakable pride. The kettle-drum lasted for two mortal hours, and Mr. Lowther was one of the last to de-

part, bored to death, as he told his brother afterwards.

"But a fellow must bring his mind to go through a good deal if he wants to marry a millionaire's only daughter in these hard times," thought the *attaché*, despondently, as he went yawning to bed. "If my lovely Rosa does become Mrs. Lowther, she will have to renounce her *penchant* for bad French and violent pink dresses; but she may cram her drawing-room with acquaintance of *quasi*-gentility, and drink tea all day, so far as I shall be concerned in the matter."

CHAPTER XI.

TOO LATE.

A LONG miserable week wore itself slowly out after the night in which Francis Tredethlyn had turned his back upon a house which he had never been allowed to find a home. Through all the week there were no tidings of Maude's departed husband; but when the week was over, a formal letter from Mr. Kursdale acquainted her with Mr. Tredethlyn's arrangements for her welfare, and with the fact that he had embarked the day before on board the steam-vessel Kingfisher, bound for Buenos Ayres. The news inflicted as great a shock upon Maude as if her husband's letter announcing his intended departure had never been written. To the last she had believed, that when the time for action came, his resolution would fail him all at once, and he would hurry back to her, faithful

and devoted as in the earliest days of their brief married life, when he had nursed her Skye terriers, and sat patiently for an hour at a stretch in a haberdasher's shop while she selected ribbons and laces. She had written him a penitent letter, and had enclosed it to Mr. Kursdale, entreating that gentleman to deliver it to his client whenever he saw him. She had not thought it possible that, even if Francis persisted in his intention of leaving England, he would leave without an interview with his solicitor. But when Maude drove post-haste to Gray's Inn, and presented herself in the lawyers' office, she found that there had been no interview. Francis had communicated with his solicitor by letter only, and his clear and concise epistle bore the date of the very day on which he was to start for Plymouth, whence the Kingfisher was to sail.

The letter thus dated had arrived at the lawyers' office after business hours; and when Mr. Kursdale opened it next morning, there was little doubt that the Kingfisher was outward bound with Francis Tredethlyn on board her. Maude made a confidant of her husband's solicitor. A family lawyer

is a kind of father confessor in the matter of secrets, and has generally outlived the capacity of surprise as completely as those imperturbable disciples of St. Ignatius Loyola who are irreverently entitled "crows." The despondent wife told Mr. Kursdale that Francis had left home in consequence of a slight misunderstanding—(was any conjugal quarrel ever yet described by the belligerents as any thing *more* than a slight misunderstanding?)—and she implored him to assist her in bringing about her husband's speedy return.

"But do you think he has really sailed?" she asked; "do you think he can have been so cruel as to leave England without even giving me the opportunity of imploring him to remain?"

Mr. Kursdale shook his head gravely.

"There is nothing in his letter to me which indicates indifference to your wishes," he said; "it is only a business letter; but in a practical way it is the strongest evidence of a husband's devotion that ever came to my knowledge. We lawyers are a matter-of-fact set of men, and we are apt to form our conclusions in a matter-of-fact

way. What other people would treat as an affair of sentiment, we look at as an affair of figures; and I must say, Mrs. Tredethlyn, that gauged by that standard, your husband comes out nobly."

"But I want him to come back to me," Maude exclaimed, simply; "I don't want to be rich—or to live like a woman of fashion. He wrongs me most cruelly when he thinks that I married him for his money. I married him because he was good to my father. Do you think I could accept the income which that letter places at my disposal, knowing that my husband has left his native country because of me? Tell me what I am to do, Mr. Kursdale. I know that Mr. Tredethlyn is unhappy, and that a few words from me would set all right. What am I to do?"

"We must try to send him the few words, my dear Mrs. Tredethlyn," answered the lawyer, cheerfully. "South America is not so very far off nowadays; and you know that even in Alexander Pope's time a sigh might be wafted from Indus to the Pole, by means of ocean-postage. We'll get your letter delivered to Mr. Tredethlyn as quickly

as the improvements of modern science will allow, you may depend upon it. Shall I send the letter you enclosed to me the other day? Perhaps you would like to add something to it—another post-script, eh? Ladies have such a *penchant* for post-scripts," said the lawyer, lapsing into mild facetiousness, which he imagined to be of an eminently consolatory character. There are people who believe that a feeble joke is an infallible specific for a deeply-rooted grief.

"I will send a clerk off to Plymouth by the next train," said Mr. Kursdale, with his hand upon the spring of a little bell beside him. He spoke as coolly as if he had been talking of sending a clerk over the way. "If by any chance the Kingfisher has not sailed when the young man arrives, your husband will have the letter before dark. If the Kingfisher has sailed, the letter must be sent on by the next mail. At the worst, Mr. Tredethlyn may be back in six or seven weeks."

In six or seven weeks! It seemed a very long time; but on receiving the lawyer's letter announcing her husband's departure, Maude had fancied that

he was lost to her for ever. With what wonderful intelligence we can perceive the value of any thing we have lost! In your daily walks, O modest collector of household treasures! you will see a little bit of china, a picture, an apostle spoon, a quaint old volume in a shop-window,—and, intending to look in and bargain for it some day when you have leisure, you will pass it a hundred times, indifferent as to its merits, half uncertain whether it is worth buying; but you discover some day that it is gone, and then in a moment the doubtful shepherdess becomes the rarest old Chelsea, the dirty-looking little bit of landscape an undeniable Crome, the battered silver spoon of unquestionable antiquity, the quaintly-bound book a choice Elzevir. The thing is lost; and we regret it for all that it might have been, as well as for all that it was, and there are no bounds to the extravagance we would commit to regain the chance of possessing it.

It was something after this fashion, perhaps, that Mrs. Tredethlyn regretted her husband, as she drove home disconsolately after her interview

with the lawyer, to await the result of his clerk's journey. She would have gone herself to Plymouth if she could have done any more than the clerk; but she had a dim belief that if there was infallibility any where on earth, it was to be found in the office of an old-established solicitor, and she thought that Mr. Kursdale's accredited agent could not fail to effect some good.

Her disappointment was very bitter the next day when she received a note from the solicitor, informing her that the Kingfisher had sailed twelve hours before the clerk arrived at Plymouth.

After this Maude could only await the result of her letter. Six or seven weeks seemed such a weary time as she looked forward to it; and it might be as long as that, or even longer, before any tidings from Francis could reach her. She went to her father, to pour her sorrows into his ear; but though he received her very affectionately, she could see that he blamed her severely for the folly which had driven Francis Tredethlyn from his home.

She would have gone to stay at the Cedars during this dreary period; but she had a nervous dread of not being on the spot to receive any possible communication from her husband, so she remained amid the grand hotel-like splendour of the Stuccoville mansion; though her neighbours were daily departing for distant British watering-places, or on the first stage of continental wanderings, to toil amidst Alpine glaciers, or to lounge at German gaming-tables.

Mrs. Tredethlyn was very glad to see London growing empty; but before her acquaintance departed for their autumnal relaxations they had ample time to discuss her husband's disappearance and her own sudden withdrawal from society. The fact of that slight misunderstanding, which Maude had been obliged to confess to the solicitor, had become patent to all Stuccoville through the agency of loquacious maids and languid footmen, and had assumed every possible and impossible complexion in feminine debates. So Maude stood listlessly at one of the windows in her spacious bedchamber, sheltered by the voluminous curtains

and the flowers in the balcony, and looked despondently at happy family-parties driving away to railway-stations with cargoes of parasols and umbrellas, and deliciously fluffy carriage-rugs and foot-muffs. Other people always seem so happy. The lives of those smiling Stuccovillians might not have been unclouded in their serenity; but Maude watched them very sadly, remembering how she and her husband might have been starting in the twilight for the Dover mail, like that merry young couple from the house over the way.

Surely she must have loved him very dearly, or she scarcely could have regretted him so much. If she had been questioned as to the real state of her feelings on this point, she could not have given any very clear reply to the question. She only knew that her husband had been very good to her, and that she had repaid his devotion with neglect and indifference. Maude had been a spoiled child, it must be remembered, and there may have been something of a spoiled child's useless remorse in her penitence; but she was very penitent. All her life for the last year

had been crowded with proofs of Francis Tredethlyn's unbounded love; and, looking back upon them, she could not remember one instance in which she had been sufficiently grateful for his affection.

"Those silly young men at the Cedars used to make a fool of me with their empty flatteries," she thought, remorsefully; "and I treated Frank as I had learned to treat them, accepting his generous devotion as indifferently as I had accepted their unmeaning compliments."

There was one thing that Maude did not remember as she looked back at her past life, and that was Harcourt Lowther's influence. She did not know how much of her indifference to her husband had been engendered by the subtle sarcasms of her jilted lover; nor did she know how the schemer had practised upon her girlish love of society, in order to widen the gulf that divided her from Francis Tredethlyn. Her errors as a wife had chiefly arisen from want of leisure. She had found no time to adapt herself to her husband's tastes—no time to elevate and refine him

by association—no time to give him any return for those practical proofs of his affection in the way of jewels and carriages, thorough-bred steppers, and hundred-guinea shawls, which he was constantly lavishing upon her; and, worse than all, she had found no time to inquire how he passed his life, or in what circles he sought the happiness she had never tried to provide for him in his home.

"I will ask him to complete the purchase of the Berkshire estate when he comes back to me," she thought; "and then we shall be able to begin a new life away from this perpetual whirlpool of society; and I can drive to the meet when Frank hunts, and even take an interest in the stables. Country stables are so pretty; and it's so nice to see a favourite horse looking over the door of his loose-box, with a big tabby cat sitting on the wooden ledge beside him, and honeysuckle blowing about his head. But one's horses might as well be at the North Pole for all one can see of them in a London mews, where there are always dreadful men in shirt-sleeves, and cross-looking

women hanging up clothes," mused Mrs. Tredethlyn, with a vivid recollection of the prospect which all the ground glass in her fernery could not quite shut out.

While she was thinking very penitently of the past, and weaving pleasant schemes for the future; while she was perpetually counting the days which must elapse before Francis returned to her, always supposing that the remorseful words of her letter found their way straight to his heart, as she implicitly believed they would; while she was praying daily and nightly for his safe preservation in tempest and danger, Maude Tredethlyn took up the *Times* newspaper one morning as she loitered listlessly over a lonely breakfast-table, and the first paragraph that met her eyes was the announcement of the Kingfisher's total destruction by fire, and the entire loss of passengers and crew.

CHAPTER XII.

AN IGNOMINIOUS FAILURE.

HARCOURT LOWTHER had his copy of the great journal on the day when Maude read that horrible paragraph. Roderick had called at Stuccoville during Mrs. Tredethlyn's seclusion, and had heard of the Cornishman's departure, and the name of the vessel he had gone in, from Julia Desmond. The schemer turned deadly pale when his brother read him the brief account of one of those terrible catastrophes which come upon mortal travellers now and then, to teach them how frail is man's hold of that wondrous power by which modern science has learnt to rule the elements. The coolest villain who ever planned a comrade's destruction must surely suffer one sharp pang of remorse when he knows that the hand which has so often clasped his own is really cold. To Har-

court Lowther the wealthy Cornishman had never been any thing worse than an impediment. He was gone now; there was little doubt of that. Midway between her starting-place and her destination, the Kingfisher, sailing gaily on a placid sea, had succumbed to a worse foe than tempest or hurricane, and all on board her had perished. A fragment of charred timber, branded with the name of the steamer, had been picked up by a homeward-bound vessel; and in the calm moonlit night the blazing ship had been seen by distant voyagers a lurid speck upon the silvery horizon. By these and many other tokens the fact of the catastrophe had been made known; and in a hundred British households there was mourning for lost friends and kinsmen.

After the first shock that came upon him with these sudden tidings, Harcourt Lowther gave a long sigh of relief.

"It was the fellow's own doing," he muttered. "If he had not made a quarrel with me, this would never have happened. And he's gone! Poor lad! He was not such a bad fellow, after all. Better

to die that way than of delirium tremens," added Mr. Lowther, with a furtive glance towards a tall smoke-coloured bottle which was apt to adorn his table very often nowadays. "And so my Maude is free—at last! Do you know, Roderick, it seems to me as if I had lived twenty years or so since my return from Van Diemen's Land? and now that the luck turns, and the winning colour comes up for the first time, I feel as if I had almost outlived the power to care much about it. Roderick!" cried the invalid, with a sharp suddenness that startled his brother, "did Folson tell you there was any serious damage done to my head by that ugly fall the other night? I know he has talked to you about me. I heard you and he muttering together yesterday, when I was lying half asleep in the next room."

Mr. Folson was the medical man who had attended Harcourt Lowther after the scuffle with Francis, and who had brought all his science to bear for the preservation of the handsome face without which his patient would have been so small a creature.

"Folson said very little about the damage you got in the row," the attaché answered very coolly; "but he told me you must drop your liberal consumption of that sort of thing, or you'd find yourself very speedily in Queer Street." Mr. Lowther pointed to the smoke-coloured bottle as he thus addressed himself to his invalid brother. "While you were teaching that fellow Tredethlyn to drink himself to death, you ought to have learnt how to keep yourself alive by not drinking," he said presently. "However, I don't want to say any thing unpleasant, but you really must cut your very intimate acquaintance with the brandy-bottle, if you want to improve your opportunity, now that Mrs. Tredethlyn is a rich widow. If you don't look sharp I shall throw-over the Grunderson, and go in against you."

Harcourt smiled superciliously.

"I am not afraid of *you*, for more reasons than one," he said. "Maude is a curious girl. I sometimes fancy my own chance is not quite so good as it once was. Goethe says that a man wins in his age the prize he sighs for in his youth. Perhaps, when I am a pottering old fellow of seventy, I

shall have a great fortune and a handsome wife; only the capability of caring much for either will be gone. How fond we were of toffee at Harrow! But all the toffee that was ever manufactured in Doncaster during the Sellenger week wouldn't give me a ray of pleasure now. Madame de Maintenon began to enjoy herself when she was eighty; rather late in the day, wasn't it? My soul is weary, Roderick; and now the chance *has* come, I'm not the man I was. Perhaps, after all, the simple truth of the matter is that I am suffering from an attack of blue-devils, engendered of solitary confinement in this detestable crib. I'll tell you what I'll do, old fellow. As the ugly scar across my forehead has dwindled into a romantic-looking badge of bygone prowess, and the variegated hues of my countenance are rapidly fading into an interesting pallor, I'll get you to send me round a hack from Parsons's, and I'll take a spin in the Park; there won't be many people about at this time of year, and the fresh air will blow my old self back again, I dare-say. I'll meet you at the Metropolitan afterwards, if you like," added Harcourt, naming an adjacent

restaurant at which the brothers had been wont to dine occasionally.

"No, thanks. I dine at the Grundersons'."

"*Déjà!* We go fast, my friend!"

"If your military experience had extended farther than the superintendence of penitent burglars, you might have known that where the assailing party is weak, a fortress must be taken quickly, or not at all. I declared myself to Rosa this morning. She is delighted with the idea of flourishing at foreign courts in *écrasant* pink dresses. How I shall tone her down, poor child! and what a hard time we shall both have of it before the scent of the market-garden ceases to cling to her still! I am to speak to papa Grunderson this evening, over his wine. He consumes the best part of a bottle of old port every night, and finishes off at a neighbouring tavern with the gin-and-water of his early manhood. Rosa tells me that he is an indulgent old party, and that I shall not have any difficulty in bringing him to book."

"Then you really think of marrying?" asked Harcourt, thoughtfully.

"Really think of marrying! Of course I do. What else should I think of whereby to improve my fortunes? And Rosa will not be so *very* disagreeable after a good deal of toning down."

"I thought perhaps you might have some lingering regard for——that other person."

The diplomatist turned upon his brother with a frown.

"I thought I told you that I didn't care to discuss that subject," he said haughtily. "Drop it, if you please. There are plenty of disagreeable things in *your* life, I daresay, that I might remember if I wanted to make myself obnoxious. However, as you've been existing upon a limited supply of oxygen for the last six weeks, I suppose you're privileged to be cantankerous. I'll look in at the stables and send you the hack; and if I find you here when I come home to dress, I daresay we shall hit it better. *A bientôt!*"

Harcourt Lowther had his gallop in the Park, and punished the livery-stable hack rather severely. It was dusk before he went back to town,

and he left the Park by the Prince's Gate, and rode slowly through the gorgeous dismality of Stuccoville. He walked his horse down the street in which Francis Tredethlyn's household had been established. Glimmering lights burned feebly in the windows on the second-floor, but the gas-lit dining-room was blank and empty.

Looking up at the dimly-lighted windows, Harcourt Lowther wondered if Maude Tredethlyn's heart, set free all at once from its mercenary bondage, had fluttered back to the lover of her youth. He was strangely tormented by conflicting fancies, and found it hard to strike the balance between his low estimate of woman's constancy and his very high opinion of his own merits.

"She loved me once," he thought, "and my hold upon her ought to be stronger now than ever it was. I have quires of school-girl letters filled with protestations of eternal constancy and reliance in a bright future waiting for us somewhere in the cloudy distance of our lives. And now the happy future is ours, my Maude; you are free and you are rich; so we can afford to build the

castle of our dreams, and live in it very respectably."

Riding slowly homeward through the crowded streets, Mr. Lowther found it very difficult to shut out of his mind the picture of a burning ship, and the image of the man whom he had called his friend, prominent amidst a wild night-scene of death and horror.

"I'm glad I had nothing to do with the fellow's going in that vessel," thought Mr. Lowther, as he tried to shake off the uncomfortable feeling which oppressed him. "*I* had no hand in his mad freak of bolting off to Buenos Ayres; so I needn't worry myself about the business. If he had lived to get there safely, I daresay he'd have been finished off by fever or small-pox."

Nearly a week elapsed before Harcourt Lowther approached the woman who had once been his plighted wife, and who was now free to renew her broken vows as speedily as common decency would allow her to accept the addresses of a second husband. The schemer wanted to be sure of his triumph. One interview with Maude, one look

in her face, would be enough to tell him whether his hold on her was undiminished, whether his future happiness was secure. Assured of this, he would be contented to stand apart until the usages of society would permit him to take his place by her side as her acknowledged suitor. But he was eager to be quite sure of his position. A nervous restlessness that was foreign to his temperament had come upon him since the tidings of the Kingfisher's destruction had reached his ears; and he could not endure any thing like uncertainty or suspense.

He called at Stuccoville one morning. He was told that Mrs. Tredethlyn would see no one; but that Miss Desmond was at home, and would receive him, if he pleased.

He did please; and was ushered into the morning-room, where Julia sat writing at a little table near the window. There was a door opening from Mrs. Tredethlyn's dressing-room into this morning-room; and as Harcourt entered at one door, a pale wan creature in black appeared at the other.

It was Maude—so changed that a sudden

pang shot through the schemer's heart as he looked at her; a sudden pang that must have been remorse, but which gave place immediately to a feeling of jealous anger.

Was the loss of her husband so deep a sorrow that it should change her like this?

She had seen the visitor, and was drawing back, when he ran to her and seized her hand.

"Maude!" he cried, passionately, "I must speak to you. Surely you are not going to treat *me* like a stranger."

She tried to take her hand from his, but he held it firmly and drew her into the room; as he did so, Julia, who had risen on his entrance, went quietly out at the other door. Maude and Harcourt were alone.

"What can you have to say to me?" asked Mrs. Tredethlyn. "It is cruel of you to force yourself upon me at such a time as this. I have grief enough and trouble enough without being tortured by the sight of you."

Harcourt Lowther looked at her aghast.

"Tortured by the sight of me!" he repeated.

"Yes," answered Maude, indignantly. "It was your fault that my husband left me. It was you who planted base suspicions in my mind when there was no need for suspicion. If I had gone back to the cottage at Petersham—as I would have done, but for you—I should have discovered the folly of my jealous fancies—inspired by you—yes, by you alone. For when I saw Francis and his cousin, my first impulse was to call him by his name. It was your exclamation that frightened me; it was your manner that filled me with absurd alarm. Why did you poison my mind against the best husband a woman ever had? How could you be so base as to repay his trusting friendship with such malicious treachery?"

"Because I loved you, Mrs. Tredethlyn, and I believed that your husband had wronged you. Was *I* likely to be a very lenient judge of his conduct towards you, when I had loved you so passionately, and had been jilted by you so cruelly for him? You questioned me, and I spoke. Can you forget or deny that I spoke reluctantly? You hang your head, Mrs. Tredethlyn; ah, I see that you remember."

"Yes," answered Maude piteously, as she sank into a chair; "you are right. I made you speak. It was my own jealous folly from first to last. If others doubted and suspected, I ought to have trusted him. What a pitiful return I made him for so much devotion, when I could not even give him my confidence!" She was silent for some moments, lost in thought. It was of her husband, and not of the man standing before her, that she was thinking. Harcourt Lowther could see that.

She looked up at him presently, as if she suddenly remembered his presence. "Have you any thing more to say to me?" she asked coldly.

"Have I any thing more to say! Are you mad, Mrs. Tredethlyn, that you ask me such a question? I have outraged propriety perhaps in coming to see you so soon, you will tell me; but a man who has suffered as much as I have at the hands of the woman he loves is not very likely to be held back by ceremonial constraints when the hour comes in which he may claim atonement for the wrong that has been done him. I respect your natural sorrow for the terrible fate of your hus-

band; but I should despise you if you were so false-hearted a prude as to affect forgetfulness of what is due to me.".

Maude looked at him as she had never looked at him before. Wonder, indignation, disgust—all mingled in the expression of her countenance. He had woven his network to ensnare a frivolous shallow-hearted girl, and behold, on the completion of the schemer's web, a woman arose in the strength of her truth and purity, and shook herself free from the toils as easily as if they had been so much gossamer. "There is something due from me to you?" she asked haughtily. "What is it?"

"The fulfilment of your broken promise. I have waited, Maude, and waited patiently. Another man would have revenged himself on your inconstancy by proving to you that he too could be inconstant. Hopeless but patient, I have given you a disinterested devotion which is without a parallel in the history of man's sacrifice for the woman of his choice. Now that you are free, I ask some atonement for the past, some reward for

my patience. Tell me that the past is not quite forgotten—that the tender protestations which consoled me in my miserable exile were not utterly meaningless and false. Why do you look at me like that? Have I been the dupe of a coquette from first to last, Mrs. Tredethlyn, and does your husband's death only leave you free to jilt me again? Have I been fooled to the top of my bent by a woman who has never loved me?"

"No, Mr. Lowther," Maude answered, very quietly; "I did love you once. I look back now, and wonder at myself as I remember how dearly. But my love died—a very sudden death."

"When you discovered the advantages of a wealthy marriage for the penniless daughter of a commercial defaulter," cried Harcourt.

"No; my love for you was a girlish fancy, if you like; though Heaven only knows how deeply I felt for you in your exile—how willing I would have been to resign my imaginary wealth for love of you, if you had asked me to do so. But you never did ask that. You did not want the wife without the fortune. When you came home and

found me engaged to another man—about to sacrifice myself in a mercenary marriage, as you thought—there was yet time to have exacted the fulfilment of my promise. I loved you then, Harcourt Lowther. A word from you, and I would have told Francis Tredethlyn the truth, and demanded my release. He was far too generous to have withheld it. But in doing that I should have offended my father, and I should have come to you penniless. You did not want me on those terms, Harcourt. The honest indignation of a disinterested lover never found an utterance on your lips. You were contented to assume the position of friend and confidant to your unconscious rival; and it is only since I have been left alone to think of my past life, that I have fully understood the dishonour involved in keeping our broken engagement a secret from my husband. I loved you when you came back to England, Harcourt. It was a hard battle which duty had to fight against the unaltered affection of my girlhood. I prayed to God night and day for strength to do my duty, and to keep my promise to the man who had a

claim upon me, which you have never known. I prayed for power to blot your image from my mind; and my prayer was heard. My first foolish love died on my wedding-day, Harcourt, when you stood by to see me married to Francis Tredethlyn. From that hour to this you have been no more to me than any other man who has paid me the conventional attentions which I imagined I had a right to receive. If I had ever seen more than this in your conduct, Mr. Lowther, you would have found me quite capable of asserting my position."

"The world has chosen to see a good deal more than conventional courtesy in my attendance upon you, Mrs. Tredethlyn," answered Harcourt. He had lost the game. Utterly defeated in the moment of his expected triumph, he was careless as to the rest of his play. How can the whist-player, who knows that he is beaten, be expected to pay any great attention to the order in which he plays the two or three insignificant cards that he holds at the close of the rubber? "People have been good enough to make us the subject

of considerable discussion, Mrs. Tredethlyn," continued Harcourt. "A man is apt to hear these things, though they rarely reach the ears of the lady most interested in hearing them. The people amongst whom we live have made up their minds about us, I know, and will be considerably astonished if you throw me over now that you are free to reward the patient devotion which has endured so much in the hope of this hour."

He saw Maude's look of unutterable scorn; a look which revealed her to him in a new and higher light, and inspired him with a more passionate love than he had ever felt for her yet—and at his worst he had loved her.

"Maude," he cried, in a sudden access of mingled rage and despair, "why do you goad me to say these things? I know how detestable I seem to you. And yet, as there is a heaven above me, I have loved you truly from first to last. Pity me if, while I prayed for no better fate than to face the enemy's guns on an Indian battle-field, I was a coward in social life, and dared not brave genteel poverty even for your sake. Pity me if

I shrank from thrusting myself between you and a wealthy marriage. I had been poor all my life; and I knew what you have never learnt—the horrors of a gentleman's poverty. I have smiled at your girlish talk of pretty cottages and tiny suburban gardens; an elegant little drawing-room, in which you and I might spend the winter evenings together with our books and music. The poor gentleman's cottage is never pretty; the poor gentleman's drawing-room is never elegant. His wife's tastes may be ever so simple, his own aspirations may be ever so pure; but poverty countenances no taste, permits no aspiration. His wife is fond of music, perhaps. Heaven help her! she cannot be sure of an hour in which her piano may not be seized by the broker. She delights in flowers; but the nosegays she arranges so gaily to-day may entail a writ for the florist's account to-morrow. You would have thought me a model of all that is noble and disinterested if I had exposed you to such miseries as these: you think me a scoundrel because I was not selfish enough to say to you, 'Reject Francis Tredethlyn and a life of ele-

gant ease, and accept my devotion and an existence of penury and trouble.'"

"And you ask me now to fulfil my broken promise? Have you inherited a fortune, Mr. Lowther? or how is it that your ideas upon matrimony have altered?"

The schemer flushed crimson to the roots of his hair, and then grew deadly pale. For the life of him he could not answer that question. He could not say, "*My* position is unchanged, but *you* are rich. Give me your fortune and the heart I did not choose to claim when it was unaccompanied by fortune."

"Had we not better wish each other good morning, Mr. Lowther?" Maude said, after a little pause. "Your visit is ill-timed and most unwelcome. Your presence reminds me of cruel wrong done to a noble friend, a devoted husband, whose worth I have learned only too late; whom I have loved unconsciously, only to discover the depth of my affection when its object is lost to me for ever."

"You loved your husband!" cried Harcourt,

with a cynical laugh; "you seem determined to astonish me to-day. You loved your husband?"

"Yes—dearly and truly; and love his memory better than ever I loved you. I have learned to think, since I have been released from your influence; for it was your influence that regulated my life as well as my husband's; it was your influence that kept us asunder, and plunged both of us into a whirlpool of dissipation. I have had time to think during the long miserable days and nights in which I have watched for the coming of him who was never to return to me; and if I had not discovered the shallowness of your love before my marriage, I should have made that discovery since. You are base enough to tell me that the world has linked my name with yours. I can afford to despise a world in which I have never found real happiness, and in which I no longer wish to hold a place. I shall go back to my father's house, and my life will be one long atonement for the past. I tell you this, Mr. Lowther, in order that you may understand that we must be strangers to each other henceforward."

She laid her hand upon the bell as she spoke. Harcourt Lowther stood for some moments looking at her. A strange compound of passionate admiration and vengeful fury flamed in his eyes.

"I have sometimes wondered at the madmen who murder the women they have loved; but God help you, Maude Tredethlyn, if I had a loaded pistol in my pocket to-day!"

He folded his arms, locking them together with a convulsive suddenness, as if he could only thus restrain the impulse by which he would have struck her down where she stood defying him; and then he turned, and slowly left the room.

He had left his hired horse in the quiet street, in charge of a boy; but the boy's back was turned when his employer left the house, and Harcourt Lowther drove back to town in a hansom. It was only when his brother reminded him of the horse, that he remembered how he had gone to Stuccoville; and sent a man to recover the missing steed. After that he left the noisy regions of the Strand, and wandered across one of the bridges out to some dismal waste-ground in the neigh-

bourhood of Battersea; a remote and forgotten tract, that was almost as lonely as an African desert: there he laid himself down amongst the rubbish of a deserted brickfield, and cried like a child.

CHAPTER XIII.

SUSAN'S GOOD NEWS.

MAUDE TREDETHLYN sat alone in her spacious chamber: oh, so spacious, so splendid, so dreary, so ghastly, with a tall carved walnut-wood bedstead that was like one of the tombs in Père la Chaise, only not so lively, and with long panels of looking-glass shimmering ghost-like in dark walnut-wood wardrobes and armoires, and *duchesse* dressing-tables. She might have endured her troubles better, perhaps, if her room had been furnished with white and gold rather than so much funereal walnut-wood and ghastly looking-glass. She sat alone, thinking of the husband whom she had lost, and whose worth she had only discovered when it was too late. She would accept sympathy from no one. Julia wrote her letters, and saw people who must be seen, and was very good; but

the wayward heart shrank away from her in its sudden desolation. She had loved him—she had loved him — and had been ashamed to confess her real feelings either to herself or to the people who had smiled upon a mercenary marriage as if it was the most natural thing under heaven; but who would have lifted their eyebrows in scornful surprise had they known that she could care for a person whose boyhood had been spent in a humble old homestead among the Cornish moorlands. Gliding gracefully through her frivolous life, tolerably happy in a shallow kind of way, with more shopping, and driving, and riding, and calling, and kettle-drumming, and dinner-giving, and horticultural-fête attending, always to be done than it was in the power of any one woman to do, except by a perpetual scramble, she had found no time to consider her position, no time to be aware how entirely even her most frivolous pleasures depended on the faithful minister whom no influence could entirely divide from her.

Amongst the papers she had looked over on the library shelves and tables, where the dust lay

thick, she had sometimes found a sheet of perfumed note-paper, and a list of items in her own writing —commissions she had given Francis to execute, troublesome ones sometimes, involving loss of time, and patient inquiry amongst West-end emporiums—orders for new books, drawing-materials, ferns, music, all the frivolities of her life. She remembered with a cruel pang of remorse how faithfully the smallest details had been remembered, how patiently the most tiresome researches had been conducted, and how very lightly all this untiring service had been accepted. Circumstances which she had been too thoughtless to notice at the time flashed back upon her now, and she remembered how Harcourt Lowther had stepped between her and her husband even in this commonplace communion—how Francis had been pushed aside, politely taught to remember what an ignorant and awkward creature he was when compared to the fine gentleman.

As she sat alone, upon the evening after her interview with Harcourt Lowther, her husband's image was more vividly present with her than it

had been at any moment since his departure. The bright honest face—the faithful loving face—shone out upon her in the ghastly twilight of her ghastly chamber, and she thought how pleasant it would have been to be sitting opposite her husband in the firelight glow of a cosy parlour, far away from splendid loneliness and carved walnut-wood. She thought of him, with her face hidden in her hands, and her aching head lying wearily on the sofa-cushion. She thought of him until a nervous restlessness came upon her, and she sprang suddenly to her feet, unable to bear the oppression of that dreary room, or any room in that dreary house.

"I must go away somewhere, or I shall die," she thought; "this place seems haunted. I will go to papa. He is very good to me, but he does not understand what I feel about Francis. People speak so lightly of him, and seem to have known him so little. If I could talk to any one who really loved him; if I could talk to any one who knew his goodness as I ought to have known it—as I do know it, now that he is dead!"

She crossed the room hurriedly, and rang the bell. She had told her maid to bring lights only when she rang for them, much to the dismay of that sympathetic young person, who believed that candle-light and company were eminently consolatory in all earthly sorrows. When the candles came, Maude went to a writing-table, and wrote a few hasty lines to her husband's simple little cousin. She had written to Susan once before, to tell her of Francis Tredethlyn's departure; but the two women had not seen each other since their first meeting.

"My dear Susan,—There is terrible news of your cousin: it may have reached you before this, perhaps. Will you come to me? I am so utterly miserable! and I believe that you are the only person in the world who can understand my sorrow. Come, dear, I implore you. Ever your affectionate

"Maude."

Mrs. Tredethlyn was a great deal too impatient to wait for any such commonplace means of com-

munication as the post. She summoned her maid, and intrusted her letter to that faithful attendant, with directions that a groom should mount one of the park-hacks immediately, and ride straight to Petersham with the missive. The maid obeyed; and the groom, who had made an engagement to go half-price to a West-end theatre, departed, grumbling sulkily, and determined on punishing the park-hack for the unwarrantable caprice of his mistress.

Maude slept soundly that night for the first time since the tidings of the Kingfisher's fate had reached her, and woke in the morning to see Susan looking down at her with a smile upon her face.

"Ah, you don't know," cried Maude, waking out of a happy dream to an instant consciousness of her sorrow,—"you don't know what has happened: you haven't heard?"

"Of what, dear?" Susan asked gently, as Maude started up from amongst her pillows feverish and excited.

"The loss of the Kingfisher—the fire—the dreadful fire! Oh, Susan, you *cannot* have heard!"

Mrs. Tredethlyn said this, because the girl's face, though it was grave and sad, expressed none of that acute anguish which Susan ought to have felt for her cousin's untimely fate. She only looked at Maude with a wondering earnestness.

"Yes, it was very dreadful," she said. "Mrs. Clinnock read it in the paper, and told me. I am so sorry for all the sufferers. But oh, Maude, dear cousin, how grateful we ought to be for the accident that saved Francis from such a fate! If he had gone by that vessel, dear——"

She stopped suddenly, for Maude looked at her with an unnatural stare, and then fell back unconscious.

No, he had not perished with the ill-fated passengers of the Kingfisher. Lives as noble, friends as dear, husbands and fathers, brothers and sons, worth and genius, some tribute from all that is brightest upon earth,—had gone down to the deep waters; but Francis Tredethlyn had not made a part in the mighty sacrifice. When Maude recovered from the deadly faintness that

had come upon her, Susan showed her a letter which she had received from her cousin,—a letter that had been written in an hotel at Plymouth *after* the sailing of the Kingfisher. It was a kind kinsman-like letter, stating the arrangements which the writer had made for the comfort and welfare of his cousin and her child; and, in conclusion, Francis told Susan that he had reached Plymouth too late to leave by the Kingfisher, a steamer which he had intended to go by, and in which he had taken his berth. Thus left with his time on his hands for some days, he had resolved on going to have a look at the old neighbourhood once more.

"It might seem a foolish fancy to many people, but I don't think it will to you, Susy," he wrote. "I want to gather a handful of daisies from my mother's grave before I leave the soil that holds her for ever. I want to stand by the old hearth once more, though God knows what a pain it will be to me to see strangers in the old home. God bless you, dear, and good-bye! I shall not write again till I write from the New World."

This was the close of the letter, which Susan gave Maude to read. Her first feeling on reading it was unbounded gratitude to the Providence that had saved Francis Tredethlyn. Her second feeling was considerable indignation against Francis himself. The mother of the comic song who bewails her missing child in such pathetic numbers, and slaps him soundly when she finds him, is not such a very impossible character.

"It was shameful of him to let me suffer so much," she cried, "when a few lines from him would have made me so happy;" and then she was grateful to Providence again, and angry with herself for having been angry with Francis; and then she pounced upon Susan and kissed her.

"What am I to do, darling?" she asked. "I daresay he has gone off by some other horrible steamer. But wherever he is, I won't stop idle in this dreary house. I won't trust every thing to that slow solemn lawyer. I'll go to Cornwall myself, Susy, and find out all about my husband; how long he stayed there, and when he left. You'll tell me where to go; won't you, Susy?"

Of course Susan was ready to give her cousin's wife all needful information about that forgotten corner of the earth, Landresdale. She would have volunteered to accompany Maude to the western moors, only there was the boy; and Susan had an idea that if she were to turn her back upon her son for twenty-four consecutive hours, he would inevitably be seized with measles or scarlatina in her absence. But Maude declared she wanted no one to accompany her.

"I suppose I must take my maid," she said; "but I shall leave her at the inn at Falmouth, and go alone to that queer old house on the moor, and those queer old people Francis once told me about."

Julia Desmond had to endure a good deal that morning, for Maude was radiant when she appeared with Susan at the breakfast-table. She was so grateful to Susan for hurrying to her in the early morning.

"Every night, when I have gone to sleep, I have thought the same thing," she said: "if I could only wake and find it all a dream—if I

could wake to find it only a dream! And this morning I did wake to find an angel standing by my bed with the best news I ever heard in all my life. But I am very sorry for those poor people who were really lost in the Kingfisher," added Maude mournfully; she felt that there was something almost incongruous in her own happiness when so many must be sorrowful for the destruction of that ill-fated vessel.

While she was making preparations for her departure, Mr. Kursdale the solicitor was announced. He came radiant and red-faced to tell her the result of inquiries which he had considered it expedient to have made at Plymouth before taking any legal steps with regard to the supposed demise of his respected client; and the result was that Francis had not sailed in the Kingfisher; and he was very proud and happy to announce to Mrs. Tredethlyn—

He would have gone on in a ponderous manner for some time longer, if Maude had not interrupted him by the assurance that she knew all about it.

"You did not ascertain that my husband had left Plymouth by any other vessel?" she asked.

"No."

"Then we may hope he is still in England. I am going to Cornwall immediately to look for him. At the worst, I shall there hear all about him."

Mr. Kursdale evidently thought this very unprofessional, and suggested the expediency of a clerk acting as Mrs. Tredethlyn's proxy; but Maude shook her head.

"I will go myself," she said. "If my husband is still in England, I will find him. There can be no further misunderstanding between us if once we can meet face to face."

Mr. Kursdale submitted, and departed. Maude ran away to superintend her maid's packing of a small portmanteau, and Susan sat in the morning-room with Julia. It had been settled that Miss Desmond should drive her back to Petersham after luncheon.

They were talking rather ceremoniously; when the door was suddenly opened by an impetuous

hand, and Miss Grunderson burst in upon them, more intensely pink than usual.

"They wanted me to go to the drawing-room, and they'd go and see if Mrs. Tredethlyn was at home!" exclaimed Rosa. "I know what their going and seeing is. Not at home always; and I do so want to see that poor darling; and I'm sure there's no one in the world more truly sorry for her than I am; and if going into half-mourning would have been considered a tribute of sincere respect, and not an intrusion or uncalled for, I would have ordered a crape-bonnet, trimmed with lilies of the valley and jet beads, directly I heard of it."

Julia interrupted Miss Grunderson with a simple statement of the fact which had put an end to Maude's brief time of mourning. Rosa's delight was very genuine, and on being introduced to Mrs. Lesley, she expanded as it was her wont to expand on all occasions.

"You can't think how glad I am!" she exclaimed; "for I assure you when I heard of that *dreadful* event, I felt as if it was quite hard-hearted

of me to be happy, and I have been very happy for the last week or so. In point of fact," added Miss Grunderson, dragging at the button of a very tight glove in evident embarrassment, "I'm engaged to be married."

"Indeed!" said Julia, politely.

"Yes. You see as par has long objected to my running after public characters, which of course was tiresome to him,—for of all the people to tear about to all sorts of inaccessible places, and oblige one's getting up unreasonably early in the morning to hear them or to see them, public characters are the worst,—so par was really glad for me to be seriously engaged to any body that would keep me quiet, he said, even if the person was not rich; so when Mr. Lowther—Mr. Roderick Lowther, you know—proposed, par happening to be in a good temper, it was all settled immediately."

"I am very glad to hear it," answered Miss Desmond; "but I am not at all surprised. I quite expected as much."

"Did you really, now? Well, upon my word,

I thought at first he was almost as grumpy as Rochester in *Jane Eyre;* but when those grumpy people do begin to pay one compliments, it is *so* nice. Of course, with regard to Mario, Lord Palmerston, Sir Edwin Landseer, and Charles Mathews, my feelings will be unchanged to my dying day. But the worship of public characters need not interfere with the happiness of domestic life; and as Roderick's position in the *corps diplomatique* will take us abroad, his jealousy need never be aroused in the slightest degree."

Miss Grunderson entertained the two ladies for some time with minute details of her own affairs, and she confessed presently that Roderick had promised to call for her.

"He doesn't want to see Mrs. Tredethlyn, you know," she said; "he was only anxious to express to you how sorry he is, and so on—though, of course, now he hasn't any occasion to be sorry, thank goodness!—but you don't mind his coming to fetch me, do you, dear? The carriage is waiting for me, and I'm going to take him on to the Haymarket, where we're to see about the re-

setting of some old-fashioned diamond-earrings that Roderick's ma has sent me. They're not nearly as handsome as my own, you know; but, of course, I feel grateful to her for the attention. And I'm to go down to Lowther Hall to stay before our marriage; and I'm to be introduced to a maiden aunt of Roderick's, from whom he has expectations this very afternoon—I mean I'm to be introduced to her this very afternoon," added Rosa.

While she was chattering the door was opened, and a servant announced Mr. Lowther. He came out of the bright white daylight on the staircase into the room, which was kept cool and shadowy by closed Venetian shutters. As he looked about him, unaccustomed to the obscurity, he heard a faint shriek, and a woman who had been sitting with her back to the window started suddenly from her chair.

"Robert!" she cried; "Robert, is it you?" And then she sank down again, pale and breathless.

"Robert!" exclaimed Miss Grunderson; "you

must mistake Mr. Lowther for some one else, Mrs. Lesley. His name is not Robert."

"Perhaps not," Susan answered, sadly. "He kept his real name a secret from the poor girl who was once proud to call herself his wife; but whatever his name may be, he is my husband nevertheless, and Providence has brought about our meeting to-day.—Oh, don't add a falsehood to the wrong you have done me!" she cried, appealing to Roderick Lowther, who stood pale and confounded, with the faces of the three women all turned towards him, and with the knowledge that those scrutinising eyes were upon him. "I shall claim very little of you. I only want you to give me the name I have a right to bear; I only want you to acknowledge your son."

Roderick Lowther did not reply to this appeal. After a moment's pause he turned to Julia:

"Where do you pick up your acquaintance, Miss Desmond?" he said. "I should scarcely have expected to meet this lady here."

"This lady is my husband's cousin," answered Maude, who had entered the room while he was

speaking; "and I do not know any one who has a better right to be here. What is the matter, Susy darling?"

Roderick Lowther's heart was stirred faintly by the sound of that familiar name—the name which he had whispered so often beside a gray wintry sea, under a wintry sky, in the desolate region which had been brightened for him by his discarded wife's innocence and love.

"There is nothing that can be spoken of here," Susan answered; "I have met some one whom I never expected to see again. I will wait till my cousin comes back. I will say no more till then."

"But, good gracious me!" exclaimed Miss Grunderson, "I'm not going to be treated in this sort of way. What does it all mean, Roderick? That lady starts up all of a sudden, and calls you her husband, and then says she'll wait till her cousin comes home. I can't be expected to wait till her cousin comes home. I can't take matters so coolly. With my trousseau ordered, and all! I must and will have an explanation!"

"You shall, Rosa; but, for mercy's sake, hold

your tongue. There is some infernal mistake. You had better go home; never mind about the carrings to-day. If this lady mistakes me for some one she knows, or has a claim upon, I have no doubt I shall be able to demonstrate her mistake, if I can talk to her for a few minutes quietly. And now let me take you to your carriage, Rosa."

Miss Grunderson would have resisted such a summary way of disposing of her and her wrongs; but Roderick Lowther was firm. He led her down stairs, and he put her into her carriage, and he sent her home coolly as if she had been a packet of dry goods consigned to his temporary care, to be sent on to Mr. Grunderson.

"Awkward," he muttered, as he went back to the house; "but things always do happen awkwardly just when a fellow fancies he's swimming with the tide all in his favour."

He looked very grave as he went to Mrs. Tredethlyn's morning-room to demand an interview with Susan; but he looked a great deal more grave as he left the house after that interview and made his way back to his brother's lodgings.

He found Harcourt sitting moodily by the empty fireplace, the slim foreign bottle on the table by his side, and a cigar in his mouth.

"What is the matter with you?" asked the younger brother listlessly, as he perceived the scowl upon his senior's face.

"There is this much the matter with me," answered Roderick: "I trusted a fellow to help me in a delicate business, and I've reason to think that he took advantage of my confidence to get me into a dilemma that it will take me all my life to get out of. I have seen Susan Turner to-day."

"Indeed!"

"And she has told me something about the Registrar—something that I can scarcely bring myself to believe. Do you remember what I asked you to do for me, Harcourt?"

"Perfectly. And I have got the letter containing your request in my possession—such a nice letter! You tell me in it that you have fallen over head and ears in love with an innocent little country girl, too poor and insignificant to be your wife, too virtuous to be your mistress. Another

man might have accepted his fate, and either resigned the lady, or made some sacrifice of his own interests and married her. You were inclined to do neither, and you fell back upon a villanous expedient familiar to the readers of old-fashioned novels, and known as a mock marriage. You wrote to me about this in a half-playful tone, as if it were the simplest thing in the world —an elegant little comedy, out of which it would be your care, of course, to see that no harm should arise; and so on. The carrying-out of the little conspiracy would be very easy. You suggested how it might be done. I had only to engage some clever scapegrace to enact the Registrar; hire a parlour in some obscure street *near* a District Registrar's Office—in the same street if practicable; the ceremony would only occupy about ten minutes, and could be got over as quietly as the most commonplace morning call, if the fellow engaged to personate the Registrar knew what he was about. The dear little girl was the last person in the world to suspect any thing amiss. In short, it was the simplest possible business, and all our dear

good Harcourt had to do was to find the handy scamp who would act the official, and get himself well up in the little professional formula of signing and counter-signing, and so on, in some big books that he would get for the purpose. The certificate business would have to be finessed of course. The dear little girl would ask for no certificate, and the dear little girl's witnesses must be conveniently shut up if they made their noses unpleasantly prominent."

"I begin to understand you," said Roderick, with suppressed fury. "You sold me; and you are going to defend yourself upon high grounds, conscientious scruples, and so on. Pray proceed. That sort of talk will sound so well from your lips."

"I am not going to do any thing of the kind. I am only going to remind you that, as you never in your life did a generous thing for me, or stepped aside from your own interest or your own pleasure by so much as a hair's breadth to serve me, it wasn't very likely that I should get myself into a legal hobble—that mock marriage would have

been something like felony, I should imagine—and inflict a cruel wrong upon an innocent little girl to oblige you. I didn't wish to be too disobliging, so I arranged a marriage, but it was a real and not a sham one; and you are as tightly tied to your pretty little wife, as if the business had been transacted at St. George's Hanover Square, by a popular bishop, assisted by an aristocratic uncle to the bride."

"You are a remorseless scoundrel!" exclaimed Mr. Lowther coolly. "And I am very happy to tell you that your own pretty little plans are knocked on the head. Francis Tredethlyn did not sail in the Kingfisher!"

Harcourt gave a little start of surprise; but his countenance did not express the profound vexation and disappointment that his brother had expected to see in it. The schemer had failed so completely, that it mattered very little to him now what course events took.

"Yes, Francis Tredethlyn is alive and well, I have no doubt," resumed Roderick. "And my little Susy turns out to be Francis Tredethlyn's

first cousin. I have a recollection of her telling me, after our marriage, that her real name was something outlandish, of a Cornish character; but the name had slipped my memory completely before I met your wealthy Cornishman."

"Then the likeness which I fancied I saw in that daub of a portrait and the similarity of name were not mere coincidences, after all," muttered Harcourt. "And the lady at Petersham is my little sister-in-law. It's a pity you didn't treat her rather better," he added; "for Francis Tredethlyn could afford to give her a handsome fortune if he pleased. It is from her father he inherits his money; and if you had declared your marriage, and made things square with the old man, your wife need not have been disinherited, and would have been as rich a prize as any Miss Grunderson."

"Hold your tongue!" cried Roderick; "I know what I have lost as well as you do. If you had been aboveboard with me, and told me that you had sold me about the marriage, I might have acted differently. Why did you get me into such a mess?"

"Because I didn't choose to be your catspaw. I have been sacrificed to your interests all my life, and I was determined to keep my hold upon you when I had got it."

"And you would have allowed me to marry Rosa Grunderson?"

"*C'est selon!* I *think* I should have spoken at the last moment—and yet it might have been very convenient to hold an awkward little secret about one's wealthy brother. A man must be very hard up before he descends to that undignified mode of livelihood which the French galley-slaves call *chantage;* but when a fellow *is* hard up there's no knowing how low he may descend."

"You are a scoundrel!"

"And you are—I can't finish the sentence without sinking to slang. We resemble each other in character as we do in person."

In this fashion the brothers bandied civilities for some time; but they ended matters by dining together at the Metropolitan. Arabian traditions as to the sanctity of bread and salt cannot hold good against the exigencies of civilised life; and

men may dine together in a friendly way, and reserve the right of hating each other nevertheless.

Warmed by a good dinner and a bottle of Moselle, Roderick grew hopeful as to the future. Susan would relent from her calm determination never to hold any communication with the husband she had loved so tenderly, by whom she had been so cruelly abandoned. Francis might act in a handsome manner about the fortune which ought to have been his cousin's; and, after all, the turn which affairs had taken might not be altogether an unlucky one.

"Looking at it in any way, Rosa was a nuisance," said Mr. Lowther, as he bedewed his moustache with the rose-water which the luxurious Metropolitan provides for its guests; "and perhaps it's better as it is. We hadn't come to close quarters about the settlements; and I daresay if the père Grunderson had been brought to the scratch, we should have had a scuffle."

CHAPTER XIV.

A PERFECT UNION.

MAUDE left Paddington by an afternoon express, and reached Exeter after a journey that was long and wearisome even to a modern traveller, for whom the way has been smoothed so delightfully. It was late the next evening when she reached Falmouth, after a day in a stage-coach, and put up at the principal hotel with her maid, who was a great deal more tired than her mistress, as it is in the nature of maids to be. The coach that passed through Landresdale on its way to some still more remote and savage district left Falmouth early in the morning; and Maude left with it, this time unattended by her maid, whose curiosity had been considerably stimulated by the erratic nature of her mistress's movements, and who thought it a hard thing to be left alone to look out of the window of the hotel sitting-room, while

Mrs. Tredethlyn pursued her mysterious journey to its mysterious close.

How strange and new all the wild Cornish scenery seemed to Maude, as she sat alone in the interior of the coach, which was not affected by the sturdy agriculturists and miners who were generally the only passengers on this route! How many conflicting hopes and fears found a place in her mind as she looked out at the unknown country amidst which her husband's boyhood had been spent! Had he sailed for the New World by some later vessel than the Kingfisher? Was he far away from the rustic homestead towards which she was travelling with a faint hope of finding him at the end of her journey?—an unreasoning hope, which she tried to shut out of her mind in her dread of the cruel disappointment that might await her.

The coach put her down before the Crown Inn, and she stood alone in Landresdale High Street, with the great gates of the marquis's enchanted castle frowning down upon her from the top of the hill. She inquired about a conveyance to

take her on to Tredethlyn Grange; and the landlord of the Crown ordered the immediate preparation of a lumbering old equipage of a tub-like character, lined with washed-out chintz, which was brought forth on rare occasions, and charged for at a prodigious rate. While the equipage was being prepared, the landlord contemplated his bright young visitor with evident curiosity, and would fain have beguiled her into conversation; but Maude had no inclination to be communicative. If she was to receive a death-blow to all her hopes, she did not want to take it from the hands of this coarse common man. She wanted to go straight to the Grange and learn her fate there, and there only. The road from Landresdale to the moorland farmhouse was longer than the by-path through the churchyard by which Francis had gone; and the clumsy old brown horse, and the lumbering vehicle in which Maude was seated, progressed very slowly. The way seemed intolerably long to her; but at last she saw a gray spot against the blue sky, and made out that the vehicle was bearing towards it by a winding track

along which heavy wagons had left the impression of their broad wheels. The gray spot grew bigger and bigger against the horizon, until it grew at last into a dreary-looking habitation, with quaint old gables and moss-grown stone walls. One slender thread of smoke curled upward, white against the clear blue atmosphere; some sheep were grazing upon the patch of ground that had once been a garden; and the perfume of the clover blew towards the traveller as the fly lumbered nearer to the broken gate.

Maude looked hopelessly at the quiet house,—so little sign of occupation, so little token of life.

"He can't be there," she thought; a sudden gush of tears shutting out the gray stone-walls, the clover-field and browsing sheep. "I am too late!"

She brushed away her tears, drew down her veil, and alighted, telling the driver to wait for her; whereupon the man took the bit out of his horse's mouth and abandoned himself to slumber, while the animal cropped the stunted grass contentedly. Some sheep that had been lying in

the pathway skipped awkwardly away as Maude crossed the bare enclosure; and as she approached the door, it was opened by a tall gaunt woman, who had evidently been disturbed by the unwonted sound of wheels on the rough moorland road.

"Mr. Tredethlyn has been staying here, has he not?" Maude asked, eagerly.

"Yes, ma'am; and he's here still. Excuse me for being a little put out like, but you have taken me so aback. You don't happen to be my master's wife, do you?"

"Yes, yes! Oh, thank Heaven he is still here! Let me see him at once, please!" exclaimed Maude, trying to pass the grim-looking woman who barred her passage.

"Not yet! oh, please, ma'am, not yet!" cried the woman, eagerly. "It mightn't be safe."

"Not safe! What do you mean?"

"He has been so ill, ma'am; and the doctor's special orders was that he was to be kept from any thing that might upset him. And he talked and raved so about you, poor dear, when his senses

were quite gone, as they were for days together; and I'm sure nothing could upset him so much as the sight of your coming upon him sudden. Let me see him first, and tell him you are here. I make no doubt he'll be overjoyed to see you; but it mustn't come like a shock upon him."

"He has been ill!" cried Maude; "dangerously ill!"

"Yes, ma'am; very dangerously. We had two doctors with him at one time. Brain-fever it was; over-fatigue and trouble of the mind, and so on, the doctors said. He came up here after being too late for the steamer by which he was to have gone abroad; and he came to settle every thing about the farm and the quarries, and so on; and he worked at it night and day, without rest nor sleep, though me and my husband told him how bad it was for him; and every thing was almost settled when he woke one morning bad in his head, and after that got from bad to worse, until his life was almost give up."

"But he is out of danger now?"

"Yes, ma'am, thank God, quite out of danger

now; but, oh, so weak; the smallest child that ever I had to do with wasn't weaker than my poor master now."

Maude burst out crying. Until this moment she had stood, pale and breathless, waiting to hear that she was indeed too late—that Francis Tredethlyn had escaped the destruction of the Kingfisher only to find death waiting for him in his own home.

"Don't mind me," she exclaimed, as the gaunt woman made a clumsy attempt to comfort her; "I am crying for joy. Go and tell my husband that I am here; but not at any hazard to him. I will be very patient. Thank God I have found him! thank God I shall be able to fall on my knees by his bed-side and beg his forgiveness for my neglect and ingratitude."

Martha Dryscoll looked wonderingly at this butterfly creature, who talked hysterically of falling at her husband's feet and begging forgiveness. Francis had made no confidants in that Cornish house; and Mrs. Dryscoll began to fear that his marriage had been a very unfortunate affair, and

that this sudden arrival of an elegantly-dressed penitent was to be the last act of a domestic tragedy.

"If you'll walk in there, ma'am," Martha said, pointing to the parlour, with a severe aspect of countenance, "I'll go and see my master."

She said no more, but departed; and Maude crept into the old-fashioned room, fearful lest the rustling of her silk dress might disturb an invalid's slumber. It seemed a long time that she waited, and then Mrs. Dryscoll returned, smiling grimly this time.

"He'll see you directly minute," she said; "and, oh, he does seem so pleased, poor dear!"

She led Maude to the top of the staircase, and then pointed to a half-open door at the end of a dusky corridor, after which she went down-stairs again, and Maude heard her sobbing quietly to herself until the sound subsided in the distance.

The young wife went on to the half-open door, and entered the room in which her husband lay on a white-curtained bed, very pale, very wan, and so weak that he could not raise his hand to offer it her in token of loving reconciliation.

She fell on her knees by the bed, and laid her cheek upon the hand that was too feeble to be lifted.

"Oh, forgive me!" she said; "my dear, my love, my true and cherished husband! If you wanted to give me a lesson, you have given me a very cruel one; but you have taught me that I cannot live without you."

She sat by his pillow, with his weak head encircled by her caressing arms, and told him the story of her penitence and remorse. It was a sweet exchange of forgiveness for the past, and tender promises for the future. No denizens of Stuccoville kept watch from behind pink curtains; the driver of the fly slumbered as profoundly as one of the seven sleepers; the rustic sound of the sheep cropping the clover was the only sound that stirred the drowsy stillness. Martha kept herself discreetly out of the way; and the husband and wife, truly united for the first time in their lives in that Cornish solitude, were loath to break the spell which held them in such loving union.

But such spells have to be broken for the common business of life. Punctual to the appointed moment Mrs. Dryscoll appeared with her master's medicine; and then the lumbering fly was sent back empty to Landresdale; and after that Mrs. Tredethlyn was banished from the sick room, and made some faint show of taking a little of the refreshment which had been provided for her by Martha.

After dinner she wrote two brief notes—one to her maid at Falmouth, who was to follow her immediately with the portmanteau; the other to Julia, who was to be so good as to send her such luggage as would be necessary to her in a stay of some weeks.

After this Mrs. Tredethlyn had no more to do but to nurse her husband through the slow stages of convalescence. It was very long before he was strong enough to get up to a little Arcadian tea-drinking. It was very long after that before he was able to take a few turns in the clover-field, leaning on Maude's arm. It was still longer before he was well enough to think of turning

his back upon Cornwall, to plunge into busy commonplace life again.

If he could have been an invalid for the rest of his days, he would have resigned himself uncomplainingly to his fate; for what period of his chequered existence had been so sweet as this, in which he and Maude were all in all to each other? —this perpetual *tête-à-tête*, unbroken by the intrusion of morning callers, undisturbed by the conflicting emotions which attend social intercourse in high latitudes. And they were not idle either during these autumn months. Hidden among those wild Cornish moors, the husband and wife were very busy together—*improving their minds;* for Maude had confessed to her husband, with a good deal of girlish giggling and blushing, that her own education had been very nearly as defective as his, and that the wide fields of knowledge, which were such strange and bewildering regions to him, were scarcely more familiar to her.

"And you are so clever, Frank," she exclaimed, in conclusion; she always called him

Frank now. "You remember what those American phrenologists—Messrs. Somebody and Something—said about your perceptive faculties? You could learn any thing, they said. And we'll learn together, dear; for I'm ashamed to say I've forgotten every thing my governesses and masters taught me, except French and music, and a smattering of German and Italian. And I'm sure if you'd seen how, as soon as one master had beaten any thing into my brains, another master came and beat it out again with something else, you'd scarcely wonder that I'm ignorant. So we'll begin together, Frank dear, and learn every thing. Won't it be fun?"

A young lady who looked upon the acquisition of universal knowledge as an agreeable joke would scarcely be expected to drink very deeply of the Pierian spring. Maude imbibed the classic water in little fitful sips, and wasted a good deal of it in frolicsome splashing; but Francis had read considerably, even in the midst of his London dissipation, and he had a happy knack of remembering what he read. Mrs. Tredethlyn wrote to a

popular librarian for his catalogue; and in the pages of this pamphlet she ticked off the solid works which she considered adapted to the improvement of her own and her husband's mind.

"Merivale's *History of the Romans under the Empire!*" she exclaimed; "*that* of course we must read. I'm sure I haven't the faintest idea of Julius Cæsar, except that he always seemed to have a laurel-wreath on his head and a kind of rolling-pin—if I remember right—in his hand, and that he once passed something called the Rubicon, though *what* it was I haven't the slightest notion. We'll have the *Roman Empire;* and when we've got through that, we'll have Gibbon—in *one* volume, you know," said Maude triumphantly; "he'll *seem* shorter in one volume, even if the small print is rather trying to one's eyes. Newman's *Phases of Faith*—that sounds like theology, doesn't it? and I don't think we need begin theology yet, because if we got into the early schisms of the Church, and Gnostics, and Arians, and so on, our brains wouldn't be clear enough for Julius Cæsar. There's a life of Ma-

dame de Maintenon, by the Duc de Noailles; I think we'll have that: she'll be quite a relief after the *Roman Empire*, because one *has* a kind of idea about her, that she was a nasty old frump, and said rude things about the king, who was so kind to her, and so on."

The selection of these and a great many more books was eminently delightful; but when they came, Maude insisted on dipping into *Roman Empires* and ponderous histories of different ages just as if they had been so many novels; and she frisked among the records of the Reign of Terror with a very confused idea as to the difference between the "Mountain" and the "Gironde," but a vivid notion of Charlotte Corday having her portrait painted just before her death, and Citizen Roland's beautiful wife declaiming on the scaffold.

They were very happy together. If Francis read in real earnest, and his wife only played at reading, they were not the less united in their studies. The industrious honey-bee and the frivolous butterfly may hover about the same flower,

happy according to their different natures in the same summer noon. Francis Tredethlyn and his wife were so happy in the quiet old farmhouse that they let the autumn days drift by them in their moorland retreat, even after the Cornishman had grown strong enough for a new skirmish with Harcourt Lowther, had there been any need of a physical contest between the two men.

"We have been so happy here, Francis," Maude said one dim November evening, as the husband and wife walked side by side upon the moorland before the Grange; "but I think we have learnt to understand each other so well now, that no one in the world will be able to divide us again. And by and bye, when you have read a great deal about Julius Cæsar and political economy, and so on, and go into the HOUSE"—Maude opened her eyes to the widest extent as she pronounced the high-sounding substantive—"how proud I shall be of you; and I shall go to the Ladies' Gallery when you are going to speak! And then, when you have settled all about the Berkshire estate, how delightful it will be to arrange

our model farm, and model stables, and pineries, and vineries, and conservatories, and orchid-houses, and a model dairy, and a model poultry-yard, almost as pretty as the one at Frogmore! and then how much we shall have to think of and talk about, sha'n't we, Frank?"

"And you'll never be ashamed of me again, Maude?"

"Ashamed of you!" cried Mrs. Tredethlyn innocently; "was I ever ashamed of you?" And then she looked at her husband archly, blushing and laughing. "Well, perhaps once, when you knocked those *petits timbales de gibier* into the duchess's lap,—half-a-dozen of them at the very least, Frank; and the night you tore Lady Ophelia Fitzormond's old point: but you are so refined, Frank, so improved, if I may venture to say as much without offending you."

"I should be a churlish brute indeed, if I had not improved in the society of the sweetest wife in Christendom, to say nothing of Julius Cæsar. My great-grandfather was a gentleman, Maude; and there are few names older than Tredethlyn even in

this land of ancient lineages. We dropped down until we came to be represented by my grandfather, who lived like a peasant for the sake of hoarding his money, and in whose steps my uncle Oliver followed. I shall try to make myself a gentleman for your sake, Maude—it would never do for people to say that the lovely Mrs. Tredethlyn had allied herself to a man who was only a clod."

After this need it be said that all went very smoothly with Mr. and Mrs. Tredethlyn?—so smoothly, that poor discontented Julia abandoned the happy couple in disgust, and went abroad as travelling companion to a rheumatic old countess, who leads her a dreadful life, and insists upon being read to sleep out of German metaphysical works at weird hours of the night. She has met with Roderick Lowther in the course of her travels, lonely and cynical, looking at every thing in life through the medium of his own disappointments; for he has sought in vain for a reconciliation with his young wife, and has found to his cost how very firmly a gentlewoman can hold.

to her resolution, when her firmness is justified by the sense of a deep and deadly wrong.

They are very happy, Francis and Maude. The Berkshire estate is just one of those exceptionally delightful places which drop now and then into the hands of rich commoners when the aristocratic proprietors go to the dogs; and the Stuccoville mansion only sees its owners during the few months in which they skim the cream of the London season, before scudding off to the Continent to improve their minds among the monuments of the past, or in the most fashionable watering-places of the present. They are very happy. As time speeds on, there appears on the lawn in Berkshire a little rolling bundle of white muslin and expensive lace, which, inspected closely, turns out to be a baby, and which, if it could speak at all, would answer to the name of Lionel Hillary Tredethlyn; and by and bye, when the young couple travel in the bright autumn weather, a prim English nurse and a French *bonne* follow in their rear, and there is a little girl baby in a white

hood; and papa and mama are alike concerned for the safe conveyance of these domestic treasures. The girl baby is called Maude; but she owns a string of other names; and her two godmothers are Susan Lowther, who lives happily with her boy in the Petersham cottage, and Rosa Grunderson, who declares that, in consequence of the distracting influence of public characters, and her fatal experience of the perfidy of private individuals in the person of Roderick Lowther, she will descend a spinster to the grave.

One day, at a German watering-place, Francis and his wife hear of a man living in the same hotel with them, their countryman; a man who is young, has been handsome, and who for the last few months has been conspicuous in the gaming-saloons of the Kursaal as a desperate, and sometimes a very lucky, player—a traveller who can scarcely be an adventurer, for he has been admired and caressed by elegant women and well-born men, but who has been a hard drinker from first to last, and within the last fortnight has fallen a victim to the most hideous disease which vice

ever engendered as the scorpion-whip to work its own retribution,—a disease called delirium tremens.

The landlord of the hotel tells Mr. Tredethlyn how this wretched Englishman has his bad fits and his intervals of quiet; how he will lie down calmly enough perhaps at night, to start up mad in the dim gray morning, to walk far out into the country, hurrying wildly before the fiend that pursues him; and to fall exhausted in some desolate spot, and lie there till some passing peasant picks him up and conveys him back to his lodging. The landlord describes, with considerable vivacity and gesticulation, how this poor afflicted creature will sit for hours together, catching at imaginary insects that buzz about him and torment him; how he will watch and point to falling snow, that never falls; how, with a power that is hideously graphic, he will describe the devils that dance and gibber round his miserable bed. He tells how the shutting of a door, the rustling of a newspaper, the flutter of a fall-

ing leaf, will startle this unhappy sufferer more than an unexpected peal of thunder would startle another man. He describes the sleeplessness which no opiate is strong enough to conquer, the restlessness and depression with which medical science struggles in vain. He tells Francis Tredethlyn, in confidence, that the poor ailing wretch is all but penniless, and that very scanty supplies of money come to him in reply to the letters he writes to England now and then in his rational moments.

It scarcely needs Maude's appealing look to inspire Francis with the wish to help this unhappy countryman. He says nothing to his wife, but he goes by and bye to smoke his cigar in the lamplit quadrangle, where there is a café, and a smoking-room, and a reading-room, and a post-office, and a perpetual chatter of divers tongues, and clatter of hurrying feet. He is a long time smoking that cigar; and yet Maude feels no displeasure in his absence, as she sits alone in her balcony looking out at the lamplit town and the solemn forest looming darkly in the distance. She

knows that whatever impulse stirs her own heart is almost sure to find an answering impulse in her husband's; and she can guess what keeps him so long to-night.

He has spoken to the landlord, he tells her, when he comes back, and has given him a cheque which is to keep things smooth for the present, and has promised more money, if more should be needed; for in any case the Englishman is not to be worried about money-matters while he is ill; and above all he is not to know that a stranger's help has saved him from annoyance.

"The landlord persuaded me to go into the —poor fellow's room, afterwards," said Francis, slowly. "He thought it would cheer him up a little to shake a countryman by the hand; and I did go in, Maude,—and I saw him."

"Yes, dear; and the interview has made you unhappy, I'm sure. You are looking dreadfully pale!"

"The man is very ill, Maude, very ill. Yes, the sight of him did almost knock me over, I assure you."

It was a week after this when Mr. and Mrs. Tredethlyn left the German watering-place. They were on the point of starting from the hotel when Maude noticed the closed shutters of some windows on an upper story, and, on questioning one of the waiters, was told that the Englishman was dead. She asked her husband to tell her more about the painful end of this lonely Englishman, as they sat alone in the *coupé* of a railway carriage.

"Yes, he is dead, Maude," Francis answered, sadly. "It was a very melancholy fate. The doctors could not conquer the sleeplessness, and he sank at last into a state of coma from which he never rallied. It was a very miserable ending. He will be buried in the little Protestant cemetery. I left all necessary directions, and I have written to his friends in England. Perhaps some one who cared for him will come over to stand beside his grave. He was no friend of mine; but there seems something very shocking in this solitary death in a foreign country."

"He was no friend of yours!" repeated Maude, wonderingly; "how strangely you say that, Frank! You knew him, then?"

"Yes, Maude, and you knew him too. The man who died last night was Harcourt Lowther!"

THE END.

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